THE CHEAT

By RUSSELL HOLMAN

BASED UPON THE STORY BY

HECTOR TURNBULL

Marie A. Parlow.

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A *Paramount Picture.*

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"HE OFFERED TO LEND IT TO ME . . . IF . . . IF I'D COME TO HIM . . ."

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By

Russell Holman

based upon the story by

Hector Turnbull

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Starring
Tallulah Bankhead

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THE CHEAT

CHAPTER I

When spring comes to Paris the city is like a stately, beautiful woman donning her most youthful and most becoming gown and going out into the boulevards to dance in the sunlight to the sprightly strains of Mendelssohn. Even the gargoyles upon Notre Dame and the gargoyles who drive the Paris taxicabs seem to sense the blood-stirring effect of the season. The sidewalks in front of the cafés are cluttered with drowsing drinkers and philosophers. The brown, swollen waters of the Seine glisten as they flow slowly from the shadows of the many bridges. And one cannot walk a hundred yards upon the Champs Elysees without encountering more pretty girls than one ever thought existed.

It was late in such an exhilarating spring afternoon that a luxurious De Dion landaulet swept around a corner into the Rue de la Paix bearing in its blue-gray cushioned tonneau an exquisitely gowned young woman whom even the most exacting boulevardier would have

admitted to be arrestingly beautiful. The late afternoon sun seemed to have saved its last full radiance to provide the proper setting for her as she lounged gracefully behind the trim, black-uniformed chauffeur and looked out through the lowered window with lively, dark eyes.

Had you remarked to her about the sun's seeming benevolence, she would doubtless have dismissed it with a charming and very Latin shrug of her slim shoulders as little more than her due. Carmelita de Cordoba was used to kindness and to service and to the world in general going to a great deal of trouble for her. In her native Argentine very rich and very attractive young women are assured of a slavelike devotion from everybody except their older relatives. Should the only daughter of one of the richest and most distinguished Spanish families in South America expect less when she journeys abroad with unlimited resources to Paris, the haven of gowns, to select her wedding trousseau?

Carmelita de Cordoba had spent a month in Paris now upon this delightful mission, dipping into the expensive treasures of the famous shops—Poiret, Paquin, Cartier, Coty—spending the delightful spring days amid fawning, thin-waisted men modistes and fawning thick-waisted lady ones, with an occasional

afternoon of sight-seeing or Longchamps to vary the routine, and her nights at theaters, the opera, cabarets, and supper clubs. Her day began at noon when her suite at the Ritz, sun-drenched but lifeless until then except for the softly moving French maid and the withered Spanish duenna whom her father had insisted upon sending with her as a chaperone and general factotum, became gay with the musical, insistent voice of its owner summoning her two attendants in two languages. With the sound of water rushing into the tub and later the appearance of a dainty tray breakfast at her pillow and an array of gowns spread out for her approval at her feet, Carmelita's busy round was on anew.

The climax of her visit was now approaching. This very afternoon and evening it would be reached. For, Carmelita was to leave for Cherbourg and the ship for Buenos Aires, via New York, on the morrow.

In the flattery which the Paris shopkeepers did not have to be prompted to lavish upon Señorita de Cordoba there was rather less insincerity than is the lot of the average rich lady customer. With her perfect ivory-like complexion, large, warm black eyes to match her lustrous, almost purple-black hair, a lithe figure to excite any Parisian modiste into ex-

plosive ecstasies, and an astute taste in clothes that tempered her Spanish flair for bright color with an acquired American dislike for the flagrantly gaudy—Carmelita, despite her decided opinions and her flashes of South American temper at times, was a pleasure to serve. In the good modiste there is something of the artist that responded instantly at the sight of her.

The landaulet, flowing smoothly through the mellow sunshine of the Rue de la Paix at length glided toward the curbing and came to a stop. The impassive French chauffeur held open the door and Carmelita alighted. Across the concrete sidewalk another uniformed Frenchman was holding aside another door, the entrance to the famous and, on the outside, quite somber establishment of Doucet et Cie, gowns. But within all was mellow color, soft carpets, velvet tapestries, and bowing attendants with frock coats.

Carmelita had hardly made her entrance when a small, bald-headed man with a funny, waxed moustache and a flower in his buttonhole came twittering up to meet her.

"Carmelita, my dear," he exclaimed, "we thought you would never get here." Even as he uttered his complaint his little sea-blue eyes flitted momentarily to a good-looking manni-

kin who was passing, and Carmelita was not disturbed. Her small delinquencies never disturbed her. She laughed.

"I don't believe you've been bored, Jackie," she chided him, with a nod at the mannikin's back. Her voice was low, rich, with the trace of an accent. "Where is the distracted Lucy?"

Jack Hodge waved his cane down the center of the shop. A tall blonde woman of thirty-five or thereabouts, obviously American, sat cross-legged upon one of M. Doucet's gilt chairs. Eyes half closed, she was smoking a cigarette in an incredibly long black-lacquered holder.

"I can see that Lucy is worried to death about me," bantered Carmelita. She had been calmly ignoring the shop attendants who bowed and fluttered around her. With Jack Hodge she approached the third member of their party.

Lucy Hodge drew deeply upon her cigarette and raised lazy gray eyes to acknowledge Carmelita's presence. She was the soul of languor, pampered languor that is never forced to hurry. "Ah, my dear, you are here at last. Do let's start your show and get it over with."

Carmelita at last admitted the existence of

the manager of the shop, who had been standing with discreet anxiety a little aloof. She spoke sharply.

"Where is Monsieur Doucet? Why is he not here?"

Her dark eyes were narrowed a little and her tone had a note of the imperious in it. The manager disappeared and returned shortly with a small Frenchman and a large Frenchwoman, M. de Doucet and his chief assistant, both sputtering apologies.

"Mademoiselle desires to inspect her trousseau?" asked the man.

"Mademoiselle will come with me?" suggested the woman.

"The show begins," smiled Carmelita, recovering her good humor, to the Hodges and started toward the dressing parlors, followed by the subservient duo.

When she reappeared fifteen minutes later, swinging slowly, gracefully toward them, she was gowned as a beautiful bride—a lovely symphony blended of white silks and laces. Her two attendants hovered near, adjusting, admiring.

"It's wonderful, Carmelita," Jack exclaimed.

"Very good, my dear," Lucy Hodge admitted, attesting the success of the costume by really opening her eyes and removing the

cigarette from her carmined lips to get a better view.

Carmelita surveyed herself in a cluster of glistening mirrors, her hand unconsciously stroking the soft, rich material. She was beautiful, unusually beautiful in this most romantic of all costumes, she told herself. Her father would be pleased. He would not be sorry he had yielded to her and allowed her to journey to Paris, to buy her wedding trousseau. And her fiancé—here Carmelita sighed. She turned to M. Doucet and suggested a few minor alterations, then retired to change back into her chic afternoon attire.

"Mademoiselle desires to see the rest of her trousseau?" the modiste asked when she reappeared.

"That was the arrangement, was it not?" Carmelita asked coldly.

"Heavens, is there another act?" Lucy sighed.

"We've hardly begun, my dear," the bride-to-be smiled, tapping her American friend consolingly upon her thin shoulder. Carmelita was thoroughly enjoying herself among these dainty, extravagant things.

The brightening eye of Jack Hodge forecasted what was coming. Carmelita had arranged to inspect her purchases by means of a private fashion show of carefully selected

mannikins. Over the soft carpets they presently sauntered with their gracefully professional slouch. A stunning evening costume, a trim gray traveling suit, afternoon gowns, sport clothes, filmy lingerie and, at the last, a sheer, fluffy nightgown of crêpe de chine passed in slow, dazzling array—Carmelita's complete trousseau. Jack Hodge stood entranced until Carmelita broke the spell.

"It was worth waiting for, was it not, my Jack?" she smiled.

"You bet," he said, too forcefully, so that Lucy raised a questioning eyebrow toward her husband.

"You are a very lucky girl, my dear," said Lucy. She yawned. "And all this for an old man whom you do not love."

Carmelita sighed thoughtfully. "Why is it always impossible to combine money and love, Lucy?" she asked.

"It isn't," replied the American blandly. "But why insist upon them both in the same man? You know my advice—marry for money and position as your fussy old father wants you to,—and seek your romance where you can find it."

Carmelita shook her head.

"In a way, dear Carmelita, you are unfortunate," Lucy continued upon her favorite subject. "You have your Spanish love for

the outward show of romance, the tinkling mandolin and serenading lover sort of thing, combined with the American attitude toward marriage. My countrywomen, as you know, expect husband, lover, amusing companion, good provider, and father for their children all in one poor, frail man—and, Carmelita dear, it simply cannot be done. Men are not constructed that way. One goes to one man for one thing and to another for another. And if one is discreet—"

"What a frightfully wicked lady for a prospective bride to be receiving advice from," Carmelita chaffed. She knew that in reality Lucy was far too busy keeping check upon Jack's philandering to have time for affaires du cœur of her own.

"Oh, you'll come to it, my dear. I know you so well. You cannot do without money and you love love. And one is so seldom able to find the two together." Lucy was gathering her light, gray cloak from the back of the chair. "Meantime let us disperse to our homes. You are with us to the Folies and supper to-night, of course. Your farewell party, you know. I have left it to Jackie, and he promises something extraordinary. Managing parties seems his sole accomplishment. Dudley Drake and Prince Rao-Singh, glaring at each other as usual, and the rest of your

admirers will be there. Paris will be a barren place for the men when you leave, Carmelita." She lifted her long, lazy body from the chair. "Come along, Jackie, you're to buy me the peignoir I told you about, you know."

Carmelita spoke for a few moments to M. Doucet regarding the delivery of her purchases, then accompanied the Hodges to the street before taking her leave of them. The first shadows of twilight were beginning to slant across the Rue de la Paix—a warm clear evening in May, breathing of Spring. Carmelita settled with a sigh into the cushions of the landaulet.

CHAPTER II

Despite the pleasure she had taken in the visit to Doucet's, there was a plaintive touch in the heart of Carmelita de Cordoba as the limousine bore her through the busy streets, now streaked with the first shadows of twilight, in the direction of the Ritz, and her lovely face bore a trace of discontent. This vague dissatisfaction of life and particularly her approaching marriage had been increasing within her as the day of her departure from Paris grew nearer.

Carmelita had not troubled to conceal from her intimate friends the fact that she did not love the man to whom she was affianced. How could she?

Don Pablo Mendoza, her fiancé, was over fifty, her father's closest friend, their neighbor, and, like the de Cordobas, the possessor of considerable wealth and its South American concomitant, power. Since the earliest memories of her girlhood her life had been more or less intermingled with his. Her first recollection of him was when he was thirty—handsome, swarthy, a disfiguring dueling scar

upon one cheek—picking her up in her father's house and bestowing kisses and presents upon her. She was a little dark flower of five.

But Carmelita did not grow older quite as fast as Señor Mendoza. Don Pablo, it was said in Buenos Aires, lived his life to the full in the unstinted Spanish fashion. An unattached bachelor of unlimited means, he was a favorite among the aristocratic bon vivants of the Argentine capital, a free spender, a frequenter of gambling clubs and the racetrack. His hair grayed rapidly, his never very stalwart frame bent under the strain his mode of living was placing upon it. Even at forty-five, when a man is at his prime, the rich Don Pablo, drinking wine in the study of Don Caesar de Cordoba, Carmelita's father, would wheeze and make much ado as he attempted to rise from his favorite easy chair. Nevertheless, Señor de Cordoba would never permit any criticism of his crony. Their friendship had been one of the few points of mild contention between the worthy señor and his wife, who had died when Carmelita was eight. She had never been able to understand why her husband, a man of the most austere habits, should be filled with such a passionate loyalty and liking for a shallow pleasure-seeker of Mendoza's rather streaky reputation. She admitted that the man was a sprightly, intel-

ligent companion and of an old and distinguished family. But Theresa de Cordoba, a woman of quiet good sense, had never been deceived by these surface charms.

If her mother were living, Carmelita now reflected, tenderness trembling about her little mouth, she would probably not be in her present dilemma of heart. Her mother could have imposed a quiet but firm resistance to the engagement that might, as it generally did, induce her father in the long run to abandon his long-cherished ideal of a union between the de Cordoba and Mendoza families, between his only daughter and his dearest and oldest friend.

In the matter of marriage, Don Caesar de Cordoba was wholly Spanish. A girl married the man whom her parents chose for her, and money and position and honor were the chief points to consider. Don Pablo Mendoza met these requirements admirably. And was he not, in addition, the one man whom Don Caesar had for so many years loved like a brother, the friend who, though nearly Don Caesar's own age, had compensated in some measure for the fact that there was no son and heir in the de Cordoba family? At the time of Carmelita's birth, her father had ardently wished for a son. He had not troubled to conceal his disappointment, and there had never been between

Carmelita and him an intense bond of sympathy or understanding. He bestowed upon her, as a matter of duty, all the luxuries that his great wealth commanded, but he did not trouble to read her heart. She loved him dutifully but not warmly, and in her respect for him there was mingled much that was fear.

At the death of her mother Carmelita had been placed in charge of strait-laced duennas, at times under the supervision of unsympathetic female relatives of her father's who came to the Hacienda de Cordoba for long visits. She had been surrounded with every luxury but love and freedom. No wonder she came to divide all people into two classes—servants, whom one treated firmly and a little contemptuously; relatives and friends of her father, whom one avoided as much as possible and feared. Don Pablo Mendoza, the only member of the latter class who unbended himself to be friendly with her, she regarded with embarrassment and awe, even after their engagement.

Don Caesar de Cordoba had indirect business connections in the United States that contributed in an important measure to his fortune. Once each year he usually made a combined social and business visit to New York, occupying about three months. It was during these periods of her father's absence that Car-

melita's naturally exuberant spirits were allowed their freest rein. She bullied her tutors and guardians with practical impunity and lived something approximating the life which a nine- or ten-year-old girl of excellent health and growing natural charm should. Don Caesar's social entrées in the metropolis were of the best and, although there was much about the rather hectic and undisciplined American life as lived in New York, which he did not at all approve, he rather enjoyed the busy round of dinners, opera and theater that supplemented his business conferences.

It was during one of these periodical visits to America that he had become acquainted with the Hodges. Jack Hodge had inherited from his father a partnership in the firm of Hodge and Story, Don Caesar's American representatives in one of the important and very lucrative lines in which he was interested. Hodge, a waster and seeker after the froth of life, contributed nothing to the old-established concern except the luster and reputation of his surname, which his grandfather and father had won. Jack merely drew a periodical stipend from the business and asked no questions. The importance of Don Caesar de Cordoba and his good will had been many times impressed upon the irresponsible Hodge by his father, and upon the death of the latter

Jack had made an effort to cultivate the dignified Argentinian upon the occasions of his visits by the only means he knew—lavish entertainment.

Lucy Hodge, a clever woman of no particular family but, at the time she first married Jack and was not so sure of him, of an alert ambition, was wiser. She perceived the possibilities in the business connection between the wealthy de Cordoba and her husband's firm and the importance of retaining the Spaniard's friendship. She played up to him skillfully, and she was a very good actress. Don Caesar admired her good looks, her carefully modulated manners, her clothes, and the slow, lazy, almost Spanish grace of her.

Lucy had been largely responsible for his decision, when Carmelita was fifteen years old, to send his daughter to an American convent to be educated. This, to Don Caesar's mind, would serve two purposes. It would enable the girl to receive the advantage of an American education, and he was a great admirer of education in general and the American educational system in particular. And it would, to put it plainly, rid him of the necessity of exercising a personal vigilance over Carmelita's welfare for a while.

So Carmelita, a dark, slender girl with the awkward grace of fifteen, her large black pools

of eyes bright with excitement, proud of her gray, immaculately dressed father and the quiet, effective calm with which he directed porters and other menials about and inserted order amid the chaos of departing passengers at the dock as far as their own voluminous luggage was concerned, boarded the steamer at Buenos Aires for the first great adventure of her thus far rather uneventful life. There was some regret in her heart at leaving the trim, broad acres of the de Cordoba estate, ten miles away in distance and a century away in everything else from this bustling metropolitan confusion. But she had never been very happy at home, and, though she was under no delusion regarding the hilarious life one leads at a convent, knowing something about Spanish ones, still the future was alluring.

The convent which Carmelita's father and Lucy Hodge had selected for his daughter was located some thirty miles from New York in a region of trimly kept wealthy estates of Wall Street millionaires and lesser moneyed and golfing gentry. The modern buildings of fieldstone in a setting of green lawns and symmetrically planted shrubbery, were located a mile from the nearest road and isolated by a high, ivied wall as effectively as if they were in the midst of a wilderness. There was here

none of the cold, indigent austerity of European convents. Indeed the name "convent" was nearly a misnomer. The official title was the College of Saint Isabella; it was a parochial college for Catholic girls which merely aspired to the rigid discipline and self-denials of the traditional convent without succeeding very well.

Carmelita spent four rather happy impressionable years there and acquired many things that had a permanent influence upon her. Among these spirited, healthy American girls for the most part, chafing under restraint and guarded with understanding tolerance by their teachers and spiritual guides, the pretty Spanish girl was at first timid and confused. But Carmelita had never been by nature bashful, given half a chance. She was the daughter of a man of unlimited resources, and she had always been taught to be conscious of the position and power which these afforded her. She made friends easily—not close friends, to be sure, for the type of quick-witted, American girl which appealed to her was not long in detecting something a little arrogant and selfish about Carmelita. There were possibilities for slipping through the rigid régime of the convent and learning something about the great, bustling American world outside, Carmelita found.

New and quite revolutionary ideas began piling up in Carmelita's alert brain. She learned that the delicious germ of romance attacks the American girl early and is not to be denied by such an earthly impediment as a convent wall. Her roommate, a blonde and buxom girl two years older than she and the daughter of a Chicago millionaire meat packer with the impossible name of Fleischer, confided to Carmelita one evening after lights during the first month of their association that she was in love with a Yale sophomore and was smuggling letters out to him. Carmelita was thrilled. The wide-eyed Spanish girl and the sophisticated Chicago miss discussed romance in the dark for several weeks. Carmelita was permitted to read the collegian's ardent and misspelled letters. It was all very wonderful.

"My father hates him," declared the confiding Miss Fleischer. "If he ever caught sight of Bob he would probably kill him. At least there would be a frightful row. But I am going to marry him just the same."

Carmelita was shocked. Did American girls then marry against their parents' wishes? It was very strange. She recalled with amusement now how utterly aghast she had been when her roommate did not return from the Christmas vacation and she learned that the heiress of the house of Fleischer had carried

out her impossible threat and eloped with her young man.

At the New York home of the Hodges, where Carmelita spent her vacations, she had opportunities to learn more about the American notions of romance contrasted with parentally supervised love of the Spanish type. For while during her first year at the College of Saint Isabella she was just an awkwardly pretty girl of sixteen and rather an incumbrance upon Lucy's social activities while at the Hodge house, during the next three years she underwent a characteristically rapid Spanish maturing. Lucy now found that she had at her disposal an unusually attractive young lady of a warm brunette beauty. She was a welcome addition to the Hodge entourage.

Within the hulking brownstone of the Hodge home on Riverside Drive, and the twenty-room Hodge "cottage" at Newport, Carmelita met men who were neither to be treated as servants nor to be feared. At first she was flattered at the attentions they paid her. But as she grew older and more sophisticated through the lore retailed to her by her school chums and through the worldly observations of Lucy and through her own swiftly developing savoir faire in her relations with men, a new Carmelita flowered —a Carmelita of radiant beauty, soft black

eyes that could look coquettishly over a colorful Spanish fan, a Carmelita who could hold her own with the most blasé American flapper when it came to flirtations with vacationing college boys, a Carmelita who loved exquisite clothes and the admiring eyes which focused upon her when she entered the dining-room at the Ritz or the Hodge box at the Metropolitan, a Carmelita who had never been denied anything that she wanted which wealth and power could buy.

There had been a short, rather desperate affair with a Princeton junior who had met her at the Hodge home during the Christmas holidays in her third year in America and had thereafter for two weeks besieged her day and night with flowers and tons of expensive candy and invitations. For forty-eight hours Carmelita fancied herself rather hard hit also, especially during their twenty-dollar midnight taxi ride through Central Park. But, returning to college, the young man, who enjoyed the decidedly American name of Harkness, evidently permitted memories of Carmelita's loveliness to exclude everything else from his head, for he failed ingloriously at mid-years and was expelled from the college to his Indiana home. Gradually his ardent letters, which Carmelita had smuggled in to her through secret channels and enjoyed but did

not bother to answer, grew fewer. And eventually she said a little sadly to Lucy Hodge, who had regarded the affair with watchful and amused indulgence, "I don't think I shall ever love just one man. I'm too selfish. I want them all to love me and let me choose a particular one for each occasion as I do my gowns." Which pleased Lucy very much.

Don Caesar de Cordoba made it a point to visit his daughter at least once a year. At intervals he professed to be alarmed at the worldly polish she was acquiring. But in reality he was pleased. She had developed into an alluring woman of quite evident poise and sophistication, a slightly arrogant little tilt to her smooth chin, an ease with older people that was quite different from the ungainly girl of fifteen whom he had brought to Lucy and the convent. A true de Cordoba—and an admirable wife for his old chum, Don Pablo, the charming connecting link between the fortunes and power of the honorable and ancient families of de Cordoba and Mendoza.

So thought Don Caesar as his old friend and he sat smoking and occasionally sipping wine and talking of the intricacies of Argentine politics upon the broad piazza of the Hacienda de Cordoba.

But when Carmelita's four years of American education that had taught her so much that

is not read in books were completed and Carmelita came home, her father received an unpleasant shock. Don Pablo had now grown very gray but his small eyes brightened at the sight of the new Carmelita and he was more determined than ever to marry her.

"Give her a chance, my friend, to become Spanish again," Don Caesar warned him. They waited two years, when Carmelita was twenty-two and lovelier than ever, and then Don Caesar broached the subject of marriage to her. He was surprised to meet opposition. Marry old Don Pablo? Carmelita was incredulous that her father was in earnest. Convinced that it was indeed so, she protested vehemently. Life, having been so lately offered her so richly, was about to be snatched away. It was impossible! But she did not protest so vigorously as would an American girl under the circumstances.

Carmelita was still at heart Spanish, and daughters of rich Argentine families do not usually balk at their parents' attempts at matchmaking. Moreover, she was in the back of her pretty head not unaware of the advantages of pleasing her father and marrying a man of fortune and position.

In the end her opposition affected her father's temper so badly that he even mentioned the Spanish word for "disinheritance" in pun-

ishment for her disobedience, and Carmelita, who could never conceive of herself as anything but a daughter of wealth, was finally frightened into the decision which all along she had feared she would have to make. Weeping bitterly, she consented to her betrothal to Don Pablo, permitted herself to be kissed by him that evening and was present when her father and he drank their health with a very special vintage of wine. Then she retired to her boudoir to write a tear-splotched and utterly wretched letter to Lucy about it. The reply she received cheered her up. It congratulated her upon making a great catch and concluded, "Why so keen for love? We can't have everything. Besides, the right man will come later probably. Meantime, why not persuade your wise old father to permit you to come to Paris for your trousseau? Jackie and I are sailing next week. You can do the shops and have a final fling. But please do not let your father see this letter." The always cautious Lucy.

Don Caesar de Cordoba allowed Carmelita to go to Paris because his conscience troubled him a little for having forced her into the engagement against her will, though he was convinced that it was for her advantage as well as his own and that her opposition was a mere girlish whim and unworthy of her. Meanwhile

he would reward her for yielding and he would impress Don Pablo with the fact that only the most famous modistes in the world were worthy to gown a de Cordoba bride.

In Paris, Carmelita, now twenty-three and quite breathlessly beautiful, had met the Hodges—and, under their auspices, Prince Rao-Singh and Dudley Drake.

Lucy Hodge made a specialty of entertaining personages. Prince Rao-Singh, an Indian potentate of, reported, fabulous wealth, educated at Oxford, a tall, dark, suave and somewhat sinister man of thirty-five, of excellent breeding and manners, was the most talked about notable who associated with the wealthy American social colony in Paris. He was a bachelor who seemed to prefer the company of Americans to that of the English or his own people. Lucy, who had at one time boasted confidentially to Carmelita that she could meet anybody in the world, including kings, if she wanted to and flippantly furnished the formula, had cultivated him assiduously because he added a bizarre note to her parties and because his acceptance of her invitations, to the exclusion of so many others, aroused the envy of rival hostesses.

Until the arrival of Carmelita, Prince Rao-Singh, though discharging the social proprieties with scrupulous politeness, for the most

part had had the air of standing aloof and regarding the extravagant foibles of the Americans and the attempts of Lucy's flattering friends to cultivate him, with somber and somewhat disinterested eyes. But upon being introduced to Carmelita, her vibrant body on this occasion set off by a striking black Parisian evening gown that disclosed the creamy whiteness of her arms and neck and maturing bosom, the eyes of the Indian prince were at last aroused. For the first time he openly cultivated one of Lucy's coterie. He danced with her exclusively. He secluded her at a table for two at the smart cabaret which Lucy's party visited after the theater and talked with her gravely and interestingly. But there was a glint in his inscrutable dark eyes, an intense manner of looking at her, a something which thrilled Carmelita and made her a little afraid.

In the days that followed, Rao-Singh did not conceal his interest in her, to the growing uneasiness of Carmelita. She did not like him, she decided, though he had done nothing to offend her, and Lucy Hodge's bantering remarks about his infatuation for her did not help put her at her ease.

Dudley Drake did not like Prince Rao-Singh either. About Drake, Carmelita was uneasy also, but for a quite different reason. She was not sure whether or not she was in love with

Dudley. If she were not affianced to Don Pablo and if Dudley were rich and of a distinguished family, like Don Pablo, it would have helped her to decide, Carmelita was quite sure.

On the same notable evening that had brought Prince Rao-Singh, now three weeks past, she had met Dudley Drake. He had attracted her at once. An American, tall, straight as a cavalry captain, about twenty-five, he had suddenly impressed her as just about what an American should be. Lucy, discreetly questioned about him, was not so enthusiastic. Yes, he came of a good family but through the wrong branch. Jack Hodge was a business friend of Dudley's uncle, a very wealthy Wall Street operator, but Dudley was just a clerk in his relative's establishment with no money and few prospects. "Not worth a glance from your pretty eyes, my dear. Good-looking but just a poor relation who will never get anywhere," she had summed him up.

And so the Parisian duel between the "poor relation" and the Indian prince for the affections of Carmelita, already promised to the rich Don Pablo Mendoza, started. Whatever Prince Rao-Singh's feelings toward her might be, Carmelita was sure that Drake was in love with her. Though as yet he had scrupulously avoided speaking a word of love to her, his

every action betrayed him. Carmelita wondered, with an odd mixture of coquetry, uneasiness and guilty conscience, whether he would continue his restraint until her departure on the morrow and what she would do if he didn't.

CHAPTER III

Lucy and Jack Hodge were natural-born organizers of parties, and they had determined that Carmelita's farewell night in Paris would be something that would linger in her memory through many dull months of existence with the husband she did not love.

The party, having started with the Folies Bergere, had now attained midnight and one of the exclusive dance clubs on the Boulevard des Italiens catering especially to Americans' fat pocketbooks and their supposed love of jazz. However, the orchestra had at the moment subdued itself for a brief interval to the cadence of the waltz, and Carmelita was in the arms of Prince Rao-Singh. She loved to dance, and the Prince was an excellent partner. For the moment she forgot her subtle distrust of him and abandoned her emotions to the dreamy music and the seductive rhythm of the dance. Perhaps Rao-Singh was holding her a little too tightly. But she could not see the rather sinister possessive gleam in the Indian's eyes as, for instance, Dudley Drake from his place at Lucy's table could see it.

Dudley was almost rude in the intent manner he was regarding them, Carmelita thought as they glided by. He was such a jealous, dear boy. She smiled at him and on an impulse removed the red rose from the dark masses of her hair and tossed it to him as they passed. The Prince shot a quick glance at Dudley. At almost the same instant the music stopped and Carmelita, with a happy sigh, sank into her chair beside the American.

"You should have asked Lucy to dance—where are your manners?" she chided him.

Lucy turned toward them languidly. "Old married ladies do not interest Dudley. Engaged single ladies are quite dif—"

"Oh, please be nice to us, Lucy," smiled Carmelita. Lucy did not like the "us." Dudley pressed more closely to Carmelita.

"May I come to the station to-morrow and see you off for Cherbourg?" asked he in a low voice, avoiding with difficulty an impulse to seize and imprison the smooth little hand that rested carelessly upon the table-cloth almost in front of him.

Carmelita smiled at him favorably over the fresh glass of champagne which had just arrived. "I shall be very angry with you if you don't."

"And can't you and I dash off somewhere—alone—before you leave? To-night—or early

in the morning?" following up his advantage.

She patted his shoulder and said nothing.

The deep throaty voice of Prince Rao-Singh broke in upon them from the other side of Carmelita. He was addressing Lucy.

"I would be greatly honored, Mrs. Hodge, if your guests would all come to my house a little later. I have some excellent wines and other curiosities that should interest Americans. Merely a suggestion, of course."

The invitation met with instant favor. Most of the party had heard of the bizarre, richly Oriental character of the Prince's establishment, but nobody had ever been there. They were for the moment a bit satiated with the jazz the dance club offered and were keen for anything that promised a new thrill. As for Lucy, she did not like this almost whispered tête-à-tête between Dudley Drake and Carmelita and the light in their young eyes, and with all her prerogative as hostess she heartily seconded the Prince's invitation.

"We won't go?" Dudley pleaded sotto voce to Carmelita.

"Oh, we shall have to—*I'm* the guest of honor, you know. I can't run away."

The Prince was out of earshot, searching for Carmelita's wrap.

"I don't like trotting about with this Hindu,

Prince or no Prince," Dudley protested petulantly. "He is not our kind."

"This is Paris, you silly boy, not New England," said Carmelita with all the sophistication of her twenty-three years. "I'm not your kind either, you'll be saying next. I'm quite hopelessly Spanish, you know."

"You're different," vehemently.

Prince Rao-Singh was standing blandly behind Carmelita as she rose, holding her cloak ready for her and Dudley perceived that a march had been stolen upon him. At the curbing outside they hailed a flock of taxicabs driven by sleepy but voluble chauffeurs and were whisked several blocks along badly lighted streets to a somber stone private residence in a secluded avenue. There they disembarked chattering with anticipation from the taxis.

A soft-shoed Hindu servant appeared as if by magic as Rao-Singh turned his key in the door and took the party's wraps. And then it was like entering another world—a world of rich brocades and tapestries from the Orient, of silk cushions upon floors yielding and thick with precious rugs, of incense burning with acrid, insidious fumes and a great ugly bronzed Buddha at one end of a long reception hall.

"A taste of real India, is it not?" asked the

Prince softly to Carmelita while Hindu servants were regaling the guests with the promised wine.

There was something in the Prince's voice that seemed to imply to Carmelita's private ear that he had arranged this all for her. She was ill at ease.

"Yes, it seems impossible to believe that we are in the heart of Paris," she said as matter-of-fact as possible to reassure herself. He had drawn her aloof from the others.

"You are like a beautiful jewel—who belongs here," he said softly, regarding her intently. She glanced around and noticed uneasily that Lucy had captured Dudley and pinned him into a conversational cul de sac. "It is all very exotic and lovely," she said.

"I have another room which you will like. May I show it to you?" He seemed to be leading her, almost against her will, toward a door of inlaid mahogany. In a moment they were alone in a smaller and stranger, more luxurious edition of the reception hall. They stopped in front of a heavy, flat, intricately carved table. The rest of the party seemed miles away.

"Here is where I dream of romance," Rao-Singh said intensely, moving very close to her. "You are the first woman who has ever entered here."

His long, brown fingers closed upon a small inlaid box which rested upon the table. Burnt into the cover of the box was a cleverly devised tiger's head with a few words of Indian dialect underneath, the personal seal of Rao-Singh, the brand which marked all his possessions. He snapped open the lock and drew from the cushioned interior of the box a dazzling pearl necklace worth a fortune. Even in the dim light its radiance and worth were apparent. Carmelita could not suppress an exclamation of delight. Not until the Prince had unfastened the catch and made a movement to clasp the jewels around her neck did she awake to the significance of his action. She stepped back, staring at him. The passion in his dark face chilled her.

"Will you not accept it, Carmelita?" he controlled himself. "You and I are different from the others, the Americans, you know. We are of older, warmer-blooded races. We take love where we find it. You are the only woman I have ever desired to make my Princess. I want you—I—"

"You forget that I am already betrothed," she stammered and started uncertainly toward the door. He did not attempt to stop her, but his black, narrowed eyes glowered ominously.

Completely unnerved upon gaining the larger room, it seemed incredible to Carmelita

that her friends could be laughing and drinking as if nothing had happened. For the first time since her acquaintance with Rao-Singh she realized the breach between this Oriental and herself. He was a brigand, eager to seize with greedy hands what he desired. She feared him with all her heart.

She could hardly restrain her relief when Dudley Drake, having at last escaped from the capable Lucy, was at her side.

"What's the matter?" he said bluntly. "Are you ill? You look pale. It's the tobacco and this confounded incense, I guess. It's stifling here. Let's run. Will you?"

This time Carmelita gave in to him. She said good-by to her friends, kissing Lucy and thanking her with a promise to see her in the morning, not giving her a chance to question the reason for the hurried departure. Rao-Singh, now thoroughly composed, bowed over her hand and uttered a polite adieu to Dudley.

And then the door closed upon them and Dudley found himself miraculously alone with her. They walked down the steps and started to wake the snoring chauffeur of one of the taxis waiting at the curb. But suddenly Dudley paused. An ancient victoria drawn by a seedy horse and driven by an old, nodding coachman was wheeling by chance slowly up

the dark street, returning from an early morning errand.

"Let's hire the carriage," Dudley urged boyishly, pointing to it. "It will take longer."

Carmelita agreed doubtfully. He ran into the street to stop the surprised driver and managed directions to him in very bad French. The victoria was not of modern vintage. The springs in the wide back seat into which they mounted were bad and the upholstery did not smell sweetly. But sitting very close to the soft, yielding form of Carmelita, Dudley knew that a brand-new Rolls-Royce could not have carried him faster or more comfortably to paradise.

And so, in the course of two long blocks, he was venturing an arm around her and then under the spell of a single blinking star and her sweet presence, telling her simply, unevenly that he loved her. And, miracle of miracles, the proud, beautiful Carmelita was unbelievably yielding and snuggling closer to him. And finally, ignoring the broad bent back of the somnolent driver, lifting her red, warm lips to his.

"It is wicked—I know—but I love you, Dudley," she whispered with a happy sigh.

"It isn't wicked—it's wonderful," he corrected.

When they looked up the carriage had

stopped precisely in the middle of the great bridge over the Seine, and the driver and, to all appearances, the ancient horse were asleep. So the two lovers laughed and as if by a common impulse slipped out of the carriage and to the parapet of the bridge where they could look down upon the silent, moonlit river. Carmelita clung closer to him. He kissed her again and again.

"This is madness—but oh, why can't it last forever?" she murmured.

But already the cold world of reality was stealing into Dudley's intoxicated dream. Vague resentment clouded his voice as he spoke.

"Why am I not rich like the man you are going to marry?" he expressed the thought that had been troubling him since his first meeting with her.

Carmelita looked up at him questioningly. "You think then that only money makes me happy?" The question was fraught with danger for Dudley. But mingled with his outpouring of love for her was a small undercurrent of pity for himself. The lover is seldom wholly unselfish. He forgets that the cold truth is usually out of place in a declaration of intense passion.

"You have never had to live without money, dearest. I have. It is only natural that

money and luxuries are an important part of your life."

Carmelita's lips were trembling. She was hurt. Why was Dudley introducing this jarring note into her suddenly found happiness?

"I could live without even money—with you," she declared gently, pressing more tightly to him, almost pleading.

"You are so adorably perfect as you are—I wonder."

"My fortune—it is enough for both of us. We need not starve," offered Carmelita innocently. She could not understand the halting of his passionate declaration on what seemed to her a non-essential, something that could easily be settled upon the cold gray morning after. She loved him, but her pride was deeply hurt. She was becoming impatient.

"I could not live upon my wife. My love—and my pride—would die."

"*Your* pride!" Carmelita's voice and accompanying gesture were expressively Spanish. She choked her gathering tears. She looked around wildly, and before he knew what was happening had sprung into the carriage, shaken the drowsing driver fiercely into consciousness, hurled some breathless Spanish-French into his ears, and set the creaking victoria into movement. The astonished and chagrined Dudley was left watching the sway-

ing vehicle and the expressive back of Carmelita disappeared into the shadows until nothing was left of them but the monotonous clop-clop of the trotting horse.

CHAPTER IV

If you have never been caught in a Paris traffic jam you have never plumbed the nethermost depths of exasperation.

All the taxicabs, trucks, victorias, fiacres, old women, cripples, and unleashed children in the world seemed to have chosen the same precise hour the next morning to gather in the streets leading to the Gare du Nord. At least so it seemed to Dudley Drake sitting on tenter-hooks in the tonneau of a jouncing taxi, alternately reading his watch and praying to the driver for the impossible blessing of more speed. Hours seemed to pass during which the machine proceeded by asthmatic fits and jerks and appeared to be getting nowhere.

A block from the railway station Dudley paid his chauffeur and entrusted his fortune to his long legs. The boat train for Cherbourg was leaving the Gare du Nord within ten precious minutes. By dint of battering-ram tactics Dudley eventually got himself into the station, across the gloomy, high-roofed interior, and finally into the rear of

the crowd that was passing through the grilled gate to the waiting Cherbourg train.

"Express Train for New York," read the sign over the gate, a French method of flattering home-going Americans.

Dudley spurted here and there searching the faces of the passengers. And finally he discovered her, moving away from him, the tall, severe duenna preceding her with a piece of hand luggage. Dudley frantically stumbled over a porter. He became entangled in the leash of a woman's yelping poodle and had no time to be polite. But at last he caught up to Carmelita and put his hand upon her shoulder. Startled, she looked around. If there was joy in her face, she banished it quickly behind a cold mask.

"I have been trying to—telephone you—all morning," he panted. "Carmelita, forgive me for everything I said last night—except that I love you."

"Never." Her lips were firm—but trembling. She turned toward the gate. Her chaperone was already several yards ahead, blissfully unconscious of the interruption, cut off by the mulling crowd.

"Carmelita, I love you," he said desperately into her ear.

"I hate you!" with deep conviction.

The duenna, surrounded by baggage, was beckoning from the other side of the grill. The train would start in a few minutes.

"I am so utterly miserable, Carmelita."

"I am glad."

"I was a fool."

"Yes."

"At least kiss me good-bye."

"No." But her voice had lost its arrogance.

Then suddenly he had swept her, protesting and all, into his arms, for all of Atlantic-bound Paris to see, and kissed her again and again upon her petulant, trembling lips. At first she fought madly, but gradually she yielded and was clinging to him, sobbing nervously, happily. He led her, a sturdy arm supporting her, back through the crowd, away from her train and Buenos Aires and Don Pablo Mendoza and her duenna and her trunks.

And Carmelita's past, as represented by a frightened and gesticulating and very respectable elderly Spanish lady shrilling into the ears of an uncomprehending French guard her demand that the train stop at once, rolled out of the train-shed of the Gare du Nord. Dudley asked, "Can't we be married at once, Carmelita—to-day—this morning?"

She nodded assent, her eyes dancing with excitement.

And again Dudley Drake was in a taxi and very much in a hurry.

CHAPTER V

THE telephone that rested on the little stand a foot from Lucy Hodge's disheveled head tinkled insistently under the absurd French doll that covered it, and at last Lucy, blinking and yawning annoyedly in the morning sunlight drenching the room reached out a languid arm from her bed and answered.

She listened. In an instant she was wide awake—for Lucy. She questioned sharply. Finished, she thoughtfully rested the telephone upon its stand.

From the twin bed on the opposite side of the telephone table Jack Hodge was aroused to semi-consciousness.

"Jack," yawned Lucy, having recovered herself, "let this be a great lesson to you—never trust anybody. Carmelita and Dudley Drake were married ten minutes ago. That was Carmelita on the wire."

"No-o," doubted Jack stupidly. "She couldn't be such a fool."

"What I should have done, I suppose," mused Lucy to herself, ignoring him, "was to have gotten up at the unearthly hour and seen

her off at the station as I promised. Especially after the way she and Dudley left Rao's so abruptly last night. I might have suspected they would do something idiotic. However—"

"Never can tell about these foreigners, especially Spanish—hot-blooded, impulsive people," contributed the half-awake Jack. "Probably the Drake chap's done it for her money. Hasn't a penny, has he?"

"Not a sou. The only redeeming feature is that this absurd marriage can't last over six months at the most. Carmelita's father will be furious. I shouldn't wonder if he cut her off without a nickel. And she is such a little spendthrift. She could never be without the slightest luxury. I must tell the others."

She reached for the telephone, sleep forgotten, and played alarm clock and gossip-purveyor for a most enjoyable half hour. When it came Prince Rao-Singh's turn to hear the amazing news, he made a comment the significance of which the astute Lucy conjectured about later.

"I wonder," said the Prince dryly, "whether I should really enjoy this New York of yours —now?"

"There is only one way to find out," answered Mrs. Hodge. "Come and see."

In the meantime the newly married and gor-

geously happy Mrs. Dudley Drake was with her husband in his room in a second-rate Paris hotel. She was curled upon his rather uncomfortable bed and chattering while he kneeled upon the floor and tossed his belongings into a suitcase. They had decided to take the afternoon train for Fontainebleau for a hurried honeymoon and there was little time to spare. For one thing they must wire Carmelita's doubtlessly dumbfounded duenna and tell her to board the steamer with her ticket and Carmelita's trunks and throw the other ticket into the ocean. And Carmelita must, she decided soberly, send a cablegram at once to her father. About the matter of replacing, sketchily to be sure, at least two outfits of clothes that she had lost she was rather diffident about discussing with Dudley. But when she did mention it he insisted upon paying for the new purchases, though his wife's purse bulged with a sum that was double his entire fortune.

Dudley had announced that for the ensuing few days they would, as he expressed it to Carmelita's mystification as to his meaning, "shoot the works." He meant, he explained, spending their money like true honeymooners. Then they would settle down to a liquidated status. Carmelita seconded this heartily. She was very virtuous and grave and confident

now about her ability to play the rôle of a poor man's wife, but she saw no harm in postponing the beginning of the sacrificing for a few days while the first blush of their married life was painting the world such a roseate tint.

At Fontainebleau they made the delightful discovery of a little inn off the beaten track. Carmelita fell in love instantly with its jolly thatched roof and its low, solid, clean-looking appearance. The price was stiff, but Dudley lacked the heart to disappoint her. He was feeling very expansive and kindly toward the world and terribly in love.

They practically had the place to themselves.

For three glorious days they slept until noon, awakening in the lazy warmth of a pine-scented sunshine and spending the remainder of the day in tramping, rowing about the shaded banks of the little lake a half-mile from their inn, and basking in the tender effulgence of their love. Carmelita was as happy as a child who has for the first time in her life been granted perfect freedom. Wading barelegged in the lake after water lilies, smiling tenderly, bewitchingly at him over her breakfast coffee, kissing him good-night with those ripe, warm lips of hers—never, Dudley was sure, had she seemed so seductively, utterly beautiful. They

agreed solemnly that they could never be more happy.

But Fontainebleau and a slim purse do not mix for long, and in three days they found themselves back in Dudley's shoddy Paris hotel room and the cold, unsympathetic world of reality.

Two cablegrams upon which two days' dust had accumulated, were handed them by the surly clerk.

Dudley's forehead was furrowed with a frown as he read:

> Return at once. We have concluded the Duval negotiations by cable.
>
> DRAKE AND PORTER.

He read it three times. There was more to it than met the eye. He was pleased at the instructions to go back to New York. But the rest—

The senior partner of Drake and Porter was Dudley's uncle, Sanford Drake. He had given his nephew, fresh from Princeton University, a clerkship in his old-established Wall Street banking house with the idea that the youth would eventually work up to something much better. At first Dudley had toiled like a Trojan, but youth is impatient and Sanford Drake was not one who rewarded industry quickly. The financier seemed to be bending

over backward in the effort not to use favoritism with Dudley because he was his nephew. Not that Dudley expected favors. He knew that his father, an impractical dreamer, and the rich Sanford Drake had been estranged down to the day of the former's death. After three years with Sanford and Drake, Dudley was tired of waiting for "something better." He began to relax. He spent more and more time loafing around the Princeton Club in New York. He developed the habit of getting along with as little effort as possible, content with the living wage he was drawing from Drake and Porter. Finally his uncle had called him to his private office, read him rather a severe lecture upon the advantages of toil for young men, and promised him a position of more responsibility at the first opportunity.

A few weeks after this indefinite promise was made, Sanford Drake again summoned his nephew into his pompous presence and carefully dismissing his secretary for the nonce, disclosed mid much clearing of the throat and mystery and injections of technical financial jargon that Drake and Porter had been commissioned to close some very delicate negotiations concerning an important client of theirs and Duval Freres, of Paris, who held concessions in the Sear Valley. None of the Drake and Porter executives could be spared at that

time to make the trip abroad, and Dudley, with two years' war experience with France and its language, was free to tackle the job if he cared to. Dudley fairly leaped for joy. He sailed within five days.

In Paris young Drake met first an unexpected snarl of business complications, and then he met Carmelita and the Duval negotiations didn't seem very important after all. He admitted his laxness now. He had missed appointments, let people get out of town whom he should have caught and interviewed, fallen down on the job. He couldn't blame Carmelita; she hadn't known anything about the workaday side of his life, didn't yet. If he had been clever, he could have managed both. He was a fool. But was he? He had won Carmelita—and she was more precious than all the Duvals and Drakes and jobs in the world. But as far as his business career went—this cablegram—it was certainly a rebuke, the notification that he had failed, possibly dismissal.

Nevertheless he tried to turn cheerfully to Carmelita and then saw, to his misgiving, that her cablegram must have contained bad news also, for her face bore a surprised, hurt expression.

Alarmed, he put his hand upon her shoulder reassuringly.

"What is it, Carmelita?" he asked.

She controlled herself, tried to smile and crumpled her cablegram defiantly.

"Bad news, dearest? Come, buck up—we can stand anything to-day, together."

She handed him her cablegram with a pathetic little gesture:

You have dishonored the names of de Cordoba and Mendoza. I never want to see you again.

Dudley awkwardly read the stinging words over two or three times. He had not expected Carmelita's family to be overjoyed at their romantic elopement. But he had underestimated the terrible pride and ruthlessness of the old Spanish don. Not that he would have touched a penny of de Cordoba's fortune had it been showered upon him. This curt message was positively inhuman. Poor Carmelita. He put his hands on her drooping shoulders and smiled into her wet eyes. He lifted her quivering chin gently.

"We could hardly expect him to be pleased, could we, sweetheart? Don't worry—I'll take care of you, and I expect to be rich myself some day. Your father will change his mind."

And such was the present buoyancy of Carmelita's faith and courage and love that presently she was smiling also and up in Dudley's low-ceilinged, stuffy Paris room when he told

her that they must leave on the first steamer for New York, she fairly clapped her hands for joy.

"We shall get a nice apartment, shall we not, my big American? A regular love-nest—on Riverside Drive, perhaps?"

There were only two thoroughfares in the metropolis which boasted apartment houses, in Carmelita's mind—Fifth Avenue and Riverside Drive. Fifth Avenue, she judged, might be a little too expensive, considering Dudley's penury.

It worried him a little that she had so much to learn. "I'm afraid the Drive will be a little steep for us for a while," he explained. "However, time enough to worry about that when we reach New York. Meantime—how about luncheon? And we'll make some inquiries about sailings."

"The Ritz, please, Dudley. I will—what you call it?—'blow.' The breakfast on the train was so dreadful." Her expression was so pathetic that he seized her lightly under the knees and swung her into the air and kissed her on the rebound, instead of refusing her. Teaching Carmelita to be a poor man's wife, he forecasted to himself ruefully as they walked into the elaborate dining-room, was likely to prove an even more difficult task than locating the elusive Duvals had been. It was

emphatically in this luxurious atmosphere of soft carpets and well-fed diners and suave servants that she belonged.

"Is my Dudley still worrying over the cablegram?" she looked up gently from her wine glass. "It is nothing. Really I do not mind. My father has a very bad temper when he does not get his own way. As for Don Pablo—poof, I have forgotten him. Let us both dine and forget. The crab soufflee is so delicious here."

"You will be surprised," she promised gayly as the waiter disappeared. "I shall be the perfect housekeeper. Two servants—that is all I shall need. We shall be so happy."

"I wonder if you understand—" And then he decided he would not continue. There was time enough for grim reality later on. Meantime there was this exquisite creature in a perfect setting and he was the most openly envied man in Paris and two generous portions of steaming crab soufflee had been set before two healthy young people whose previous meal had been the emaciating fare served upon a French railway train.

After luncheon he discovered that there was a sailing to New York in four days. He allowed himself to be persuaded by Carmelita to an expensive outside cabin, though he attempted diplomatically to demonstrate that

the more modest inside quarters were quite as good.

"We should stifle, Dudley," she insisted. And again he lacked the heart to deny her.

The Hodges promised to see them off at the train for Cherbourg, and four days later the Drakes stood, a few minutes before train time, amid a litter of trunks, which Carmelita had declared she simply couldn't dispense with, on the fateful spot outside the grilled gate. She was eagerly scanning the crowd for Lucy Hodge.

Lucy came up at the last minute, late and self-composed as ever, and beside her ambled the colorless Jack, dapper and waxed and caned. Carmelita, in her relief that Lucy had made it, did not at first notice the tall, dark man who stood silently behind Jack gazing upon her with enigmatic eyes. Then she turned and saw that it was Prince Rao-Singh, evidently with the Hodges. Though she inwardly shivered a little, she extended her hand to him graciously. He bowed and kissed her white fingers. Dudley frowned. He had never concealed the fact that he disliked and mistrusted the man, and this foreign gesture of courtesy gave him the creeps.

"You may announce to Broadway that we shall arrive in three months or so," Mrs. Hodge was drawling. "We are going to tour a bit

and Jack intends to accomplish some intensive drinking and then we shall come home. If we are lucky, we shall bring Prince Rao-Singh with us."

Carmelita shot a quick glance at him.

"Mrs. Hodge suggests that I might find it very interesting," he agreed.

"I'm sure you would," Carmelita said confusedly.

When they had obeyed the warning of the fussy guard and taken leave of their friends, Carmelita's last backward glance despite herself was at the sinister eyes of Rao-Singh and somehow some of the gayety seemed for the moment to have disappeared from this embarkation upon this new life.

At Cherbourg, as she and Dudley leaned over the rail and watched the bustle of casting off the lines and listened to the excited adieus shouted from deck to shore, she recovered her spirits. What had she to do with this amorous Hindu? Suppose he should come to New York? Was she not the proud daughter of the de Cordobas and was not this handsome, stalwart American at her side her husband? With a little shrug that was not without arrogance she banished her fears.

CHAPTER VI

When they landed in New York Carmelita half expected to find awaiting her a conciliatory cablegram from her father, having in her own message to him taken the precaution to provide him with the business address of Drake and Porter. Hardly were they free of the customs inspectors before she persuaded Dudley to call up and see if there was any news.

"Nothing doing, my uncle says," Dudley told her from the sweltering booth. She seemed a little disappointed. "Not worrying over money already, are you, dearest?" She wasn't. But the idea that she would henceforth be cut off from the unceasing flow of gold upon which her life so far had depended gave Carmelita a feeling of vague misgiving. She had had a little taste of what it meant on the trip across. Without a maid or female companion she had been forced to do so many of the annoying things that had formerly been done for her. But was she a baby, she asked herself? She had Dudley and that made up for it. She was not soft, helpless.

The Dudley Drakes registered at the Hotel

Commodore and had their baggage sent there, having agreed to postpone looking for a permanent place to live until Dudley returned from the office the following day. He was anxious to discover just what his status was at Drake and Porter's.

It was rather an anxious young newly married man who disembarked from the subway express at Wall Street promptly at nine the next morning. Dudley waited outside his uncle's private sanctum until the secretary opened the door noiselessly and pattered over the thick carpet with her book laden with the morning's dictation and disappeared into the main office. Sanford Drake, pompous, white-haired but ruddy-faced from large doses of golf, was lighting a fresh cigar as his nephew entered. He accepted Dudley's hand and shook it non-committedly. Dudley took the chair next to his desk.

"Well, you're back, eh? Married, I believe you said over the phone. Girl you met in Paris?"

"Yes."

"H'm. French girl—American?"

"No, Spanish. Carmelita de Cordoba was my wife's maiden name."

"Any relation to de Cordoba, the South American banking man, the fellow Hodge and Story are agents for?"

"Daughter." Dudley did not like this catechizing much.

"Wel-l—you're lucky. No end of money. Suppose you'll be chucking your job here, eh?" Dudley flushed.

"Carmelita's father has cut her off as a matter of fact. Our marriage didn't please him evidently. Besides, even if it had, I mean to stick here and make good. That is—if you want me to."

At this Sanford Drake became strictly business. He lit his cigar afresh and rocked back on his chair.

"Well, I must say you didn't set the world on fire with the way you handled this Duval business."

"I know—I'm not proud of myself."

Old Drake puffed a while.

"Like to go back to your old desk and get a little wiser before you tackle something big again?"

"If you say so."

"All right—same position and same salary as before you went to Paris." And Sanford Drake began to rustle papers on his glass-topped desk indicating that the interview was over.

It was rather better than Dudley had expected but when he told Carmelita about it she pouted. "He might have given you a better

position when he found you were married. If he were my uncle, he would." Dudley laughed and kissed the pout away. He produced an afternoon paper opened at the Apartments To Let page.

"How would you like to live in Greenwich Village, Carmelita? With all the artists and writers and queer ones? Here's a place on 12th Street that sounds pretty good."

Carmelita, who had the romantic idea of the Village, shared by all the uninitiated, was interested at once. She donned her nicest Parisian gown and they walked out to Fifth Avenue and boarded a 'bus to Washington Square.

The apartment was located in a brownstone row. The exteriors of the houses were old and dingy and unprepossessing. They located the place in the advertisement, and walked up the three steps to the landing in front of the door without enthusiasm. An overalled Swede with a pipe, the janitor, answered and shuffled upstairs ahead of them to their destination. It was a furnished apartment, and the interior was unexpectedly inviting. The living-room was small and a little alcove off it served as a dining-room. In one end of the room the door opened out into a tiny kitchen and on the side another door led to a fairly good sized but badly ventilated bedroom.

Burnt orange chintz curtains at the living-

room windows livened up the place considerably. The furniture was ultra-modern—gate-legged table, rush-bottomed chairs and a low, comfortable divan—evidently very good stuff. Somebody with taste had hand-painted the two dining "room" chairs. It was all quite gay but very small and simple. To Dudley it looked very inviting and the price the janitor mentioned was within his purse. He looked anxiously at Carmelita. She was gazing about her soberly. Well, she had passed four years in a convent room no larger than this living-room. She looked at Dudley. The poor boy was so fearfully eager that she should be pleased. The janitor had discreetly departed. Carmelita on an impulse threw her arms around her husband's neck.

"I think it is like a cute little bird-cage, darling—so small and sweet—and I could be very happy here. Let's take it."

Dudley could hardly restrain his sigh of relief as he summoned the janitor back and announced their decision.

CHAPTER VII

THERE are some marriages that flow along as smoothly as the surface of a broad and unruffled river. There are others that seem balanced upon a dynamite barrel waiting for the slightest friction to blow them into bits. The marriage of Carmelita, now a year old, oscillated between the two extremes. They had spent the year in their "bird-cage" in Greenwich Village.

As far as business and his uncle was concerned it had been a prosperous, happy year for Dudley. He had gone back to work after his marriage with but one idea in his mind—to make a fortune by as rapid strides as possible in order to give Carmelita the luxuries which he was sure such an exquisite creature as his wife deserved and which he was still compelled to refuse her. After six months or more without a backsliding on Dudley's part, Sanford Drake had been forced to conclude that his nephew was in earnest. Of late the old man had been entrusting his hard-working subordinate with more responsibilities and Dudley even had visions of a partnership within a

year or so. His uncle was growing old and Dudley was the only Drake in sight to take up his burdens.

About Carmelita and their home life, Dudley had moments of uneasiness, though he was very anxious not to allow his general mood of optimism to be ruffled. But a gorgeous red rose does not flourish well in a bird-cage, that was sure.

There were times of unusual frankness with himself when Dudley admitted that Carmelita was perhaps not quite so alluring out of the silken environment in which he had first met her. She was the sort of woman who thrived upon gayety, crowds, color, excitement, sumptuous surroundings. She was gay and colorful and sumptuous herself—or nothing. To see her, in a cheap stamped gingham dress, bending over a menial household task, was incongruous and a little pathetic. Her beauty was not meant for such things. It had been because of this rather than the fact that their improving pecuniary status warranted it that Dudley had spent the extra income on Laura and installed her in the kitchen and the small box-like extra bedroom. Laura was a Negress and fat and a bit careless with grease and china. But her price was not prohibitively high and she took the heavier burdens from Carmelita's lovely shoulders and

allowed her more comforts and leisure.

Carmelita did not need more leisure. The truth was that leisure, as Carmelita might have expressed it, had she been Laura, was something Mrs. Dudley Drake had almost nothing else but. Dudley was working too hard to leave much time to cultivate his friends and he had hesitated until the advent of Laura to invite them to his apartment, which was not built for entertaining anyway, because he feared to make work for Carmelita. As for Carmelita's friends, the Hodges, practically the only people she knew in New York, had been abroad most of the time.

On a few occasions Dudley *had* brought company—men friends with their wives for dinner and bridge, and once, Sanford Drake. But Carmelita was not an excellent hostess in cramped surroundings and most Americans of the business type struck her as singularly drab and uninteresting, likewise their American wives. For one thing the latter took their bridge altogether too seriously. Carmelita was a very indifferent player, wont to chat upon irrelevant and frivolous topics during the playing of the hands, which usually brought the suppressed scorn of the ladies upon her pretty head, though their husbands seemed to like it and encouraged her. The wives were inevitably the reason why they did

not come again. For one thing Carmelita's high coloring, her large seductive black eyes, her colorful gowns always in the mode though they were simple and cost little, her Spanish birth, Paris, and the unusual circumstances surrounding her marriage—all this made the wives among the Drakes' guests a little wary.

Upon the one occasion on which Sanford Drake, following repeated urgings by Dudley, called, Dudley had nearly succumbed to nervous prostration. He had earnestly impressed upon Carmelita and Laura the seriousness of the event in advance. Carmelita, though she had never met the famous financier, had always contended that he had mistreated her husband, that Dudley should have been a partner long since. Nevertheless she promised to do her best to be agreeable to him. And then Sanford Drake, pompous as usual, obviously sniffing a little though politely at the smallness and simplicity of their accommodations, had arrived in the throes of a well-developed grouch. Laura, unduly thrilled at the state occasion, had quite thoroughly spoiled the dinner and Carmelita, glimpsing the tragedy in the dishes as they were set before her to serve —over-done chicken, charred potatoes, sooted peas—had forthwith allowed her temper to be spoiled also. What had followed was a splendid example of the peculiarly exasperating

manner in which Carmelita, as Dudley had previously discovered, could be disagreeable to the world when her feelings were piqued. A fine Spanish flash of the eyes, expressive shrugs, barbed shafts of sarcasm, and brilliant silences that exuded scorn. Dudley was quite sure that his uncle had been thoroughly disgusted with the exhibition.

What was his surprise to have the latter remark following a conference in his private office upon a business matter the following morning, "Your wife is a very pretty and clever woman, Dudley. Lots of spirit, won't be walked over, wants her own way—that's what I admire in a woman, and a man too. You're lucky, my boy. Guess she's been one of the reasons you've been tending to business lately, eh?" Accompanied by a good-natured pat on Dudley's broad back that cheered him up quite a little.

"I thought at first it might be a mistake for you to marry a girl used to money," Sanford Drake went on. "But it's not a bad thing for a wife to have extravagant tastes, within reason. It keeps a man on the job satisfying them. If a woman is the sort who's contented with anything her husband gives her, the kind who can do wonders with his twenty-five-dollar-a-week income, he's liable to go right on making twenty-five dollars a week. All the

big accomplishments in this world have been brought about through the stimulus of discontent. The meek may inherit the earth eventually, as the Bible says, but they'll be an awful while coming into their inheritance. Meantime let's have more women of spirit, like Carmelita, if you don't mind my calling her by her first name. Somehow it fits her a lot better than Mrs. Drake, because she'll always be more Spanish than American."

After this extraordinarily long and unbusinesslike bit of philosophy Sanford Drake became crustier than ever for the remainder of the day.

When Lucy and Jack Hodge returned from Europe, they came around one memorable evening to take the Drakes out to dinner and the show. Dudley had never particularly cared for the worldly, selfish Lucy and he regarded Jack as a typical spoiled millionaire's son. But he was forced to admit that it seemed nice to don evening clothes and be rolled in the Hodges' limousine to the Ritz and then to the Follies and finally to an exclusive midnight-to-morning dancing rendezvous. Carmelita, fresh and charming as if she had never known the unaccustomed drudgeries of a poor man's wife, was pleased as a child at her first Christmas.

Between the acts at the Follies when the

men went out to smoke and fumble around for some common ground upon which to meet in conversation, Lucy asked Carmelita significantly, "Well, my dear, how goes it? Tired of living in a two-by-four? Or still fooling yourself?" Lucy's motto was frankness.

Carmelita, taken off her guard, decided to play safe by bantering. "I'm happy as a lark, Lucy. You've no idea how much more simplified things are when you're poor. No worry about what gown you shall wear, no servant problem." Lucy was unconvinced.

"You don't care for parties like this any more then? Content to bring Dudley's slippers and fall asleep over the evening paper? You—the girl all Paris was crazy about? I can't imagine it, Carmelita."

"Of course I enjoy going out. I'm not an old woman. Dudley and I have fun."

Lucy looked at her keenly. "I don't believe you have very much. You look a little drawn, Carmelita. I don't believe you and I are meant for the housewife and mother sort of thing, my dear."

Carmelita was thoughtful. Lucy ventured further.

"I've never made any bones about my belief that your marriage has been a mistake. Dudley is all right, but he's poor and he'll get rich very slowly, if at all. At any rate by the time

he does it will be too late. Your beauty and youth will be gone. I know. However, that's your business." Carmelita was folding her program over and over again nervously. She wished Dudley would return. She was always so sure of herself and their two lives together when he was near. "We've taken a cute country place on Long Island for the season," Lucy was changing the subject abruptly. "I want to have you and Dudley down soon. I'll let you know later about it."

When the Hodges dropped them at their door as dawn was just breaking over the gaunt elevated railway structure at the corner and later Dudley and Carmelita were preparing to snatch what sleep there remained, Dudley's summing up remark was, "Well, a big night, dearest. It was darned decent of them. Once in a while this is fine, but it's no life for a poor, up-and-coming business man and his wife, eh?"

Carmelita smiled wanly into her dressing table mirror. Business, business. When would they have time to play a little? Lucy Hodge was such a disturbing creature, with her gowns and her limousine and chauffeur and speaking acquaintance with the suave head-waiter at the Ritz. And yet her father, Don Caesar de Cordoba, she reflected with pride, could buy and sell the Hodges without

hardly being forced to draw a check. She looked around the stuffy, low-ceilinged bedroom just before Dudley snapped off the light. What was she, Don Caesar de Cordoba's daughter, doing here beside this poor American in this matchbox of a room that could have been stuffed into one corner of her suite at the old rambling house near Buenos Aires? Then Dudley was kissing her goodnight, her doubts were swept away, and in a sudden emotion of love and contrition she locked her arms around him and clung to him passionately, secretly asking forgiveness. He was too sleepy to notice that her eyes were wet and to inquire the reason.

On a blistering afternoon in July Carmelita sat, one small foot under her, on the divan near the open window trying to catch the little breath of air that was stirring there. From the asphalt below the heat was rising in shimmering waves. It was the climax of a week of record hot weather. Even in the flimsy negligee she was wearing, Carmelita was uncomfortable and unhappy. For several days now she and Dudley had been discussing going out of town for the rest of the season and he had tabooed the project for anything but his customary two weeks' vacation.

"Then we'll blow in a lot of money and I'll buy you a hotel on Cape Cod or Atlantic City

or anywhere you say," he promised, with some vague assurances about next summer. This had not pleased Carmelita. There had been a flash of her spoiled temper and Dudley had retreated behind his newspaper. He was such a stubborn man at times, she thought.

Upon the little table near Carmelita a small electric fan was assisting the window by cuffing up a little air and some dust. Carmelita looked up to find the obese and perspiring Laura standing in the kitchen doorway surveying the electric fan with an envious eye. Carmelita and Laura had had words lately and were not upon the best of terms.

"You know the thermometer to-day, Mrs. Drake?" Laura inquired, by way of an opening in a voice that fairly itched for trouble.

"I dare say it's simply spouting out of the top of the tube," Carmelita answered indifferently, dealing a final burnish to her thumb.

Laura mopped a glistening brow and delivered her thunder-stroke as casually as possible. "I've worked in lots of hot places 'round this town, Mis' Drake, but I ain't never worked in one as hot as this. Truth is I'm goin' to quit."

Carmelita dropped her manicuring tools abruptly and faced the deserter, ready at once to offer concessions. Laura was careless and insolent at times but she was competent and, at her incredulously low price, a life-saver.

"It can't be as bad as all that, Laura. Look —I'll give you the fan in the kitchen."

Carmelita bent to unscrew the connection.

"Won't make no difference, Mis' Drake. I made up my mind to quit anyhow. My bedroom's too small for a big lady like me and it's like an oven. My sister's gettin' me a job in a hotel down to Atlantic City. She wrote me to-day to come down right away if I wanted it."

Carmelita was angry. Laura had been negotiating for other employment behind her back. More than once Dudley in the rôle of peacemaker had settled tifts between Laura and her. Had he been there then he might yet have saved the day.

"I really think, Laura, that you might have said something to me about your sister's offer, so that I could have been looking around for another servant." This was largely bluff on Carmelita's part. She had been at Dudley for a long time to permit her to discard the slovenly Laura for more attractive, expensive help and his reply had been that they couldn't afford it—yet.

Laura resented her mistress' icy tones. "Well, I only been stayin' here 'cause I thought you needed me, and Mr. Drake's so nice."

Carmelita, heat-tormented, was reckless.

"Very well. Don't let me detain you any longer then."

"You mean you want me to clear out right away—to-day?"

"If you like."

"Suits me, Mis' Drake, suits me." Laura shuffled toward her room, starting to remove her soiled apron as she went, while Carmelita, who had hardly expected her ill-tempered words to be taken literally, sprang up and followed her, offering a whole bouquet of olive branches. But it was no use. Laura was piling her belongings into a battered suitcase. Carmelita preserved her dignity until she had paid the offended Negress what she owed her out of a not too heavily stuffed purse. But when she had watched Laura from the window ambling as fast as her chronically sore feet would allow her in the direction of the elevated station and had stood for a moment in the kitchen doorway surveying the mess of dirty dishes in the sink and the wet mop Laura had abandoned on the floor, with a little discouraged cry she flung herself upon the divan and gave way to tears of self-pity.

The tinkling of the telephone bell checked her. She aroused herself from the couch, brushed her eyes a little and reached listlessly for the 'phone. It was Lucy Hodge, cool and drawling as usual. A few polite banalities and

then, "We're settled in our Long Island place for the summer, you know—Hedgewood—only an hour out and really delightful. By the way, what are you and Dudley doing over this next week-end? Can't you come down and spend it with us?"

Carmelita could have wept again, but this time for joy. Nevertheless her pride told her to be cautious. "Why, my dear, that's awfully good of you. No, I don't think we have any other plans. Let me see—no, that's next week-end—yes, I'm sure you can count on us."

"I suppose you have your own car and everything by this time. Dudley must have made a fortune in Wall Street."

"Well, we're thinking of a car but we haven't it yet."

"Jack is taking one of ours into town Friday. Suppose he drops around and picks you and Dudley up about four in the afternoon."

"That would be great." Carmelita's lips were unconsciously forming in a firm line. She was going to have some trouble making Dudley see the advantage of this. But she would do it.

When she had said good-by and hung up the receiver she walked into her bedroom and pulled open the closet door. Jerking out her wardrobe in a confused heap on the bed, she

submitted each garment to a rigid inspection. Her lips were still grim. Her clothes simply wouldn't do. She knew the kind of a crowd Lucy would have around her establishment—male tea-dancers from the Ritz, a couple of foreign celebrities, flapper protegées, idle society women of the Southampton set with their still more idle husbands and marriageable daughters—all correctly clad and cynically critical of other people's clothes. They would inspect her with X-ray eyes. She had formerly had a reputation for dressing charmingly.

There are times in every woman's life when her whole attitude toward the world depends upon whether or not she gets a new gown. Clothes to a sensitive woman are more than so much silk and satin; they are symbols. They advertise to others whether things are going well or ill with their wearer. A clever woman can read her companions' clothes like a barometer. Carmelita was quite aware of this. She felt that her good time at Lucy's depended entirely upon her being well dressed. And she was right. They would be expecting her to appear shabby. If she wore these clothes she would not disappoint them. They would laugh at her behind her back and she would be miserable. Well, she would fool them and Dudley would have to help her. She was entitled to her holiday.

Carmelita stepped out of the negligee she had been wearing in the effort to keep as cool as possible and turned on the cold tap in the bathroom shower. The water was not as icy as she could have wished it, but cascading down over her bare shoulders and her warm, boyish body it was gratefully refreshing. She rubbed herself pink with the bath-towel and felt better. Then she dressed becomingly in a plain afternoon costume, made herself up carefully, and, picking up her purse from the divan on her way out, walked to Fifth Avenue and boarded a 'bus going uptown to the fashionable shopping district.

Dudley was unusually late coming home from the office that night and he did not find Carmelita waiting for him in the semi-darkness of the living room, but beyond, their bedroom flooded with light. He stood in the doorway watching her, a wearied smile of admiration and perplexity on his lips. There were two long boxes lined with fluffy tissue on the bed behind her. New gowns. And before the mirror Carmelita, attired in a snappy white flannel sport suit, was observing the effect with critical pleasure. He did not blame her for her self-admiration. She looked stunning. At first, in her absorption in the gown, she did not notice his presence. But looking up and observing him and flushing a little

guiltily in spite of herself she approached and kissed him with unusual warmth.

"New to-day?" he asked, rather abruptly, she thought, and pointed to the boxes. He had promised her some extra money for a new suit within a week but he hadn't counted upon an elaborate outlay like this, and in advance.

"Yes, don't you think it is becoming, dear? Giddings' had a private sale and I dashed up there this afternoon."

Giddings, one of the ultra-fashionable Fifth Avenue shops, sounded ominous to Dudley. He approached the bed. "Did these boxes come from Giddings' too?"

"Yes, aren't they just too lovely for anything?" Carmelita ran enthusiastic fingers under an evening gown, negligee, silk stockings, a silk sweater, and a spangly cloak and lifted them for his approval. For the moment she forgot everything in her sincere admiration of the luxurious fabrics. There were two hat boxes on the floor unopened as yet.

"Of course they're lovely and you'll probably look wonderful in them, dear." He took her gently by the shoulders. "But all these things must have cost a lot of money. We'll have to go easy for a while longer, you know. How are we going to pay for them?"

"Well, I think I was very clever, darling. It was a sale, you know, and the prices were

ridiculously low." She took the bill from her dresser table and handed it to him.

Dudley did not agree with her that the total was ridiculously low. He was on his feet, firmly now, and he was determined not to borrow money. Yet he hated himself for disappointing her.

"This is more than we can afford at present, dear, I'm afraid. Suppose you keep the gown you have on and wait a little while longer for the others." Carmelita looked at him in amazement, eyes narrowed.

"But I've bought all three of these gowns. Can't we charge the others and pay for them soon?"

"I don't believe in charge accounts. We've threshed that all out before."

"I can't take them back."

"Yes, you can. Simply tell them that you've found you don't like them—any excuse at all." He tried to be as gentle as possible but he wasn't succeeding too well, he realized. Carmelita hated to be humiliated. Tears were starting in her eyes. She sat down on the bed and refused to speak to him for several minutes, while he sank down beside her and, putting an arm around her shoulder, sought to mollify her.

"I should like to give you everything in the world, Carmelita," he said earnestly. "You

know that. You realized I didn't have a nickel when we were married and had to borrow some money from my uncle to get started here. I've paid it all back now and have a little to spare. I'm getting along mighty well right now and I've a deal on with my uncle that, if it goes through, will put us on Easy Street for the rest of our lives. Then you can go ahead and buy out Giddings' if you like. But just at present we'll have to go very carefully."

Carmelita, vanity battling with what she had to admit was the good sense of Dudley's explanation, pouted uncertainly. "I wouldn't have gone out and bought these things without consulting you," she conceded, "if Lucy hadn't called up this afternoon and invited us out to Long Island for the week-end. We haven't been anywhere all summer and we're bound to have a wonderful time there. There's no hostess quite like Lucy. And all my clothes are such a fright. I simply had to have new ones."

Dudley braced himself for another tempest. "That was very decent of Lucy, I'm sure. And you go right ahead and enjoy yourself. But I'm afraid your Uncle Dudley won't be able to toddle along with you. I have to stay at the office until Saturday night and Sunday I have to run out to my uncle's at Greenwich. I rather thought you'd be going along with

me—he invited you—but of course you'll have more fun at Lucy's party. We were just going to discuss business and I dare say it would be boring enough. He's a bachelor—no excitement at all."

"Of course your uncle will make it some other time when you tell him we have an engagement already for the week-end."

"You don't know the old boy. As a matter of fact, this isn't an ordinary engagement I have with him. It means a lot for you and me. I told you we have a deal on."

"What kind of a deal?"

"Well, I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to tell even you, Carmelita. It will be good news when I do tell you, you can bank on that. Meantime I've got to humor him or it's all off." She was hurt. "But I'm not selfish enough to keep you from going to Lucy's jamboree. I know it has been rough for you here in this stuffy apartment and you'll have a peach of a time with your friends. I want you to go."

"Do you really mean it?" Carmelita, whose feelings were always very near the surface, was touched by his unselfishness. Dudley was an old dear after all. She permitted him to fold her in his arms. The sport suit *would* be a help. And she could get the best of her old things out to that good tailor around the

corner and bribe him to do wonders. She would open Lucy's eyes yet.

"You're sure you won't miss me?" she asked.

"Of course I shall, you silly dear, but I'd be a fine selfish old bear to keep you home in this furnace. You run along and forget me for forty-eight hours or so. It will do you good." He persuaded himself that he wasn't being magnanimous but felt a little pang of regret that she had accepted his offer and was going to Lucy's. He was quite sure he couldn't have given her up, had the tables been turned.

CHAPTER VIII

"I SAY, Carmelita, how do you stand it, really?" Jack Hodge, moustache waxed like a German colonel and a Long Island flower in his buttonhole, was alluding to the blistering heat that filled the narrow stairway of the Drakes' apartment house. Carmelita and he were descending behind the erect back of the Hodge chauffeur who bore Carmelita's two bags. They were on their way to Hedgewood, Long Island, and Lucy's week-end party.

"Oh, you're such a pampered cold-storage plant, Jackie," Carmelita bantered gayly. "You'd just wither away here, I suppose."

"I should, really."

The chauffeur, his burdens deposited, held aside the door of the limousine and Carmelita slipped in and sank into the cool depths. The driver pressed the starter and they glided away from the curb. Should she really have deserted Dudley this way? The poor boy was working so hard. But the next moment Jack had made a silly sally that piqued her into an equally inconsequential reply and she was

again in the flippant spirit of the Hodges and her approaching week-end.

The motor left the thickly-congested streets of Manhattan for the traffic-clogged bridge across the East River. Then a dive through the heat of Brooklyn and eventually out into the dusty suburbs. And finally the heart of the trim, well-kept Long Island of theatrical stars' and financiers' homes. Carmelita, despite the chatter of Jack Hodge, which was endurable because he never expected any one to pay attention to him anyway, was enjoying every minute of the ride. The breeze was rushing around the tonneau of the car like a young tempest. They were spinning along near the waters of Long Island Sound now and the salt air was like ambrosia. In an hour the limousine swept through ornamental gates, up a graceful bluestone drive and under the porte-cochère of a great rambling country house. The cool, white-clad figure of Lucy, the inevitable cigarette held in the inevitable black lacquer container between her teeth, appeared behind two servants who had evidently popped from nowhere at the sound of the car.

Lucy kissed her guest. "Good of you to come, old dear. But where is the handsome Dudley?"

Carmelita explained a little indefinitely.

"Would that all husbands were so con-

siderate," Lucy dismissed him airily. "Most of my guests have trailed theirs along. And they're frightfully in the way. Come along now and I'll show you your room and you can dress for dinner. The others are playing golf over at the country club and should be back any moment."

The house the Hodges had taken was an enormous, low, two-story mansion of English stucco architecture situated upon an eminence with a velvety lawn running down to the Sound, where a dock and bathing float jutted out into the water. The rooms were all large and airy, the living room in particular of tremendous dimensions with heavily beamed ceilings and a great fireplace of native field-stone at one end to ward off the chills of autumn and spring. The place had been artistically furnished throughout by the previous owner, Carmelita judged correctly, for Lucy had little taste in interior decoration. Or in clothes either for that matter. "I am so stupid about what is becoming. I simply pay some pirate of a modiste her fee and put my reputation in her hands," she had once explained to Carmelita. Cool-looking rattan rugs with tricky designs covered the highly polished floors sparsely and the furniture was of a wickery, summery type. And in the dining and living rooms were decanters with

glasses and cracked ice handy for those who wished to combat the heat by artificial and law-breaking means. Everything was cool, airy, comfortable. Carmelita felt herself in a new world, or rather again in the world she had abandoned when she married Dudley.

Lucy summoned her little French maid. "Mrs. Drake's room is ready?" And the two friends, chatting, followed the chic black-clad mademoiselle up the stairs. There was a refreshing breeze blowing from the Sound through an open window at one end of the wide corridor. The maid opened the door upon a commodious bedroom with bath and dressing room attached and then withdrew. But Lucy seemed disposed to gossip and took a neighboring chair as Carmelita, removing her hat, stood rescuing some breeze-blown strands of her dark hair.

"Awfully comfy quarters, Lucy," Carmelita offered.

"The best is none too good for you, old thing, after that oven of an apartment of yours. How do you stand it? Why don't you persuade Dudley to get you a place out here? Or, better still, stay on here with me as long as you like—all summer."

Carmelita did not like to admit the real reason for their remaining in the city though she was sure Lucy already knew it.

"Dudley is working hard. He feels as if he ought to stay in town this summer."

"That's too bad—for him. But you don't have to be uncomfortable just because you're married to him."

Carmelita smiled. That was the philosophy of Lucy's set. She would probably hear a lot more of that kind of talk while she remained at Hedgewood. Her hostess rose.

"Well, I'll abandon you now, my dear. I suppose you'll want to bathe and dress for dinner. Just ring for Yvonne when you need her to draw your bath."

Lucy strolled out, with a curious, calculating glance back at her guest which Carmelita did not catch.

Carmelita summoned the maid and had her unpack her bags and lay the contents away. As she let down her hair and removed her travel-crushed clothes and enveloped her warm, youthful body in the soft folds of a dressing gown, the silent, efficient Yvonne was regulating the taps in the next room and arranging the bath rugs and towels. A glow of pure pleasure and satisfaction with the world crept over Carmelita. Once more she was the pampered daughter of the de Cordobas with the universe, through Yvonne, its representative, ready to do her bidding. As the maid appeared at the connecting door

with her "Whenever madame is ready—"

Carmelita heard the whir of motors, the sliding of brakes, and the shouts of mixed voices in the drive below. Lucy's golfing guests had returned.

With the aid of the nimble-fingered Yvonne Carmelita dressed with painstaking care and in the end she was quite well satisfied with the result. Her simple black evening gown suited her brunette beauty admirably. Although her dressing had occupied considerable time, none of the others were there when she appeared in the living room. She walked out upon the broad piazza and was idly watching a slim white yacht scudding along in the first breezes of the evening out upon the ruffled waters of the Sound when she became aware of some one near her. She turned her face a little. Then she uttered a startled little gasp of mingled surprise and incredulity. The man wore a pure white turban that seemed to blend with his dark face and evening clothes. Prince Rao-Singh!

He came up to her then, a polite smile of greeting upon his thin lips. She had not recovered from the effects of her surprise and hardly knew what to say.

"Ah, Mrs. Drake," he said, "truly an unexpected pleasure."

"Please forgive me for seeming so upset,"

stammered Carmelita, "but your presence came as even more of a surprise to me than mine must have to you. You see, I did not even know you were in this country."

"Oh, yes. I am not only in this country but I am occupying the estate just down the road from this one."

For some strange reason Carmelita had a feeling of being trapped. Had the Prince known she was coming here? Was this a conspiracy on the part of Lucy and Rao-Singh? She dismissed the thought as disloyalty to her friend. Besides, Lucy knew nothing of his attempt to make forcible love to her in Paris.

The truth about this meeting would have given Carmelita a second surprise. Lucy Hodge had never expected Prince Rao-Singh to take seriously the invitation which she extended to him in Paris to visit America. But when he had announced his arrival to her over the telephone and then accepted her invitation to come out to her Long Island country home and actually put in an appearance, Lucy being an opportunist and appreciating the advantage of being sponsor for such a distinguished, rich and unusual visitor to our shores as the Indian potentate, had suggested casually that he rent a villa nearby for the summer. Prince Rao-Singh had surprised her again by acting upon her suggestion. Within a week he was

occupying the neighboring estate, had installed a retinue of Hindu servants, and was the talk of the countryside.

For a time Lucy was puzzled at the reason for his presence in America. But naturally keen when intrigue was in the wind, she guessed from his discreet questionings that Carmelita was at least partly at the bottom of it. He still coveted Carmelita. He wanted to know if she lived in New York still, if she was happy, if her husband was doing well—all these questions sprinkled through many tête-à-têtes over the tea-cups and lazy afternoons upon the Hodges' bathing raft. His interest piqued Lucy. She was not above a little piece of mischief. She would bring Rao-Singh and Carmelita together and see what happened. She did not care a snap of her fingers for Dudley Drake and his feelings. He had no right to submit a glamorous creature like Carmelita to poverty and a stifling New York apartment anyway. If trouble ensued between Carmelita and her husband, so much the better.

The invitation to Carmelita for the week-end had followed and the fact that Dudley had found it impossible to accept made matters all the more interesting.

Rao-Singh extinguished his cigarette and flicked it out upon the grass. "You are look-

ing more charming than ever, Carmelita," he offered in that grave voice of his that trembled upon the verge of an accent and never toppled over. "And may I ask you a favor? Do not let my presence make you in the slightest degree uneasy. I remember our last meeting in Paris and I have quite forgiven you for shattering my heart and not waiting to pick up the pieces." He was smiling. She glanced at him inquiringly, then, reassured, smiled in response.

"Apparently you have done an excellent job of mending it yourself," she ventured. But she was glad when Lucy joined them.

"You two are old friends, aren't you?" their hostess greeted them. "I remember that Rao was wildly in love with you in Paris and insanely jealous when Dudley stole a march on all your heavy suitors. But please, I ask you, do not start an intrigue under this chaste roof. There is already enough scandal popping here to keep the whole staff of "Town Topics" busy. Even decrepit old Jack is casting disgraceful eyes at that pretty widow of Talbot Trevor's. I don't really dare leave him a moment. When one is hostess, one is responsible for even one's husband, you know."

As she turned to go back into the house, Carmelita, with a hurried apology to Rao-Singh, joined her.

"Why didn't you tell me he was to be here?" she demanded.

"I took it for granted you knew. He has been in the society columns of all the papers. My, has Dudley forbidden you to read also? Besides, what of it if he is here? A pretty girl like you can't expect to go about anywhere without having her disappointed lovers pop up here and there. He is very interesting."

Later Carmelita discovered to her further disquiet that Prince Rao-Singh had been placed at her right at dinner. It was a gay party that flaunted prohibition at every course and she found to her relief that she was not expected to preserve the amenities and converse exclusively with her immediate neighbors. There was more or less general hurling about of badinage, especially as the post-war liqueurs and cordials had their effect. Carmelita already knew the majority of the other guests. They were Lucy's regular crowd, the itinerant week-enders who always seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of money and time to spend and invitations to accept. They hovered upon the fringe of New York society, frowned upon by the more conservative element because of their reputed excesses but many of them of too well established family connections to be totally ignored. For the re-

mainder there was a smattering of the Broadway theatrical crowd, a movie idol at present at odds with his producing company and not working but accompanied by a bobbed-haired, Benda-like dancer-wife, a pair of New York newspaper columnists of the flippant school, and Prince Rao-Singh. Lucy Hodge liked to leaven the lump of rather vapid society idlers, who were generally in the majority at her parties, with what she termed "clever people who are really doing something." Though what they were doing she neglected to specify.

Carmelita found little trouble in entering into the frivolous spirit of this assemblage. She was the most beautiful woman there and just as strikingly gowned as any. She was used to this sort of life. It was like getting back into a game she had not played for a year or more, but was nevertheless extremely proficient at. She was a little awkward in finesse at first; she could not for a while get over the feeling that all their talk and actions were a little silly and she was sure that Dudley would have agreed to this heartily. But she was anxious to have a good time and she forgave much. The atmosphere was infectious. Soon she was among the gayest of the gay. The unaccustomed intoxicants went to her head a little and spread a tolerant warmth through her, and loosened her tongue.

Carmelita discovered to her relief that Jack Hodge was seated next to her at the left. She turned a little around so as to avoid Rao-Singh without exceeding the limits of politeness and attempted to concentrate upon Jack. But Jack had eyes and ears only for the lively, plump, yellow-haired widow of the late Talbot Trevor across the table. He gave perfunctory answers to Carmelita and at length she was compelled to give him up. Determined not to resort to Rao-Singh, who seemed deeply engaged with the fair diner upon his right, Carmelita acknowledged the rather desperate efforts of one of the columnists, a tall, dark chap with humorous puckers around his mouth. Her dark Spanish beauty seemed out of place there. He was anxious to see what was behind it.

He spoke across the table through the cigarette smoke and din. "You are new among us, are you not, Mrs. Drake?"

Lucy drawled from the other side of him, "Carmelita is the prodigal daughter returned, Roy, a brand snatched from the burning heat of Greenwich Village."

Roy Daly kept by Carmelita's side as the dinner broke up and she strolled into the living room. They found two chairs near a window whose fluttering curtains promised a breeze.

"Parties aren't as restful as they used to be," he said. "It's Prohibition, I guess. People seem always to be working their heads off to have a good time before the police come. Listen to the noise around here, and everybody's stone sober. You don't seem to fit at all, Mrs. Drake."

"Why?" She wasn't at all pleased.

"You are not American for one thing. You are the beautiful lady who sits in the box of honor with the Valentinos draped around you and languidly wave your fan at the bullfight. You ride in your open carriage and throw coins at the village boys on fiesta days in your native green and white little town in northern Spain. And you marry the richest man in the country-side."

"Oh, but I don't. I marry the handsome young American whom I meet in Paris. Lucy will tell you."

"I knew it would be something romantic, anyway. It is written on your face. You are impulse, reckless. You probably worry your husband a lot but you keep him interested. And that is the first qualification of a good wife. You are the real thing, I think. Olga Lorenzo, present wife of the famous male film vamp, standing over there by the door—she is made up so as to fairly shout romance, exotic appeal. But her face is selfish,

commercial. She is as American as Lucy."

"But Lucy has none of the hectic haste of the native American about her." Carmelita wondered if this man always became so directly personal upon such short acquaintance. But she was rather enjoying herself.

"Lucy is deceiving. She is a clever woman. Like many clever women, she has an outward veneer of lazy, unseeing carelessness. But her eyes and brains are always alert. Her nerves are jumpy. Cross her and see. She is a typical American except for one thing—she is an excellent hostess."

Lucy herself appeared and persuaded them to make up a foursome of bridge in the library with herself and Rao-Singh. Carmelita was anxious to avoid the Hindu but she saw that she could not very well escape. Through the open window Lucy could make out her husband and Mrs. Talbot Trevor sharing a chair in the shadows of the piazza.

"Poor Jackie is at it again," she murmured to Carmelita. "He is not clever enough to flirt. I must persuade him to put in his time at mah-jongg or something else more worth while." She led the way into the library.

Carmelita played bridge badly and the presence of Rao-Singh as her partner did not help her game. But he was extremely proficient and more than made up for her slips. "You

have an American expression—unlucky in love, lucky at cards," he explained to her once significantly.

Lucy used her leisure when dummy to see that none of her other guests were allowed to do what some foolish people go to the country for—rest. At the end of three rubbers she judged that the party was slumping a little. Bridge at a cent a point began to pale.

She raised her voice. "There's an attractive place about twenty minutes from here where one can get a very decent game of roulette. Rao and I discovered it last week. Who's for trying it?"

Several pushed back their chairs at once. Carmelita was in something of a quandary. She would be expected to go, she supposed. She knew the Hodge crowd were rather fancy plungers upon occasion and she had no scruples about gambling herself. There was a thrill about it that was fascinating. But she had no money to risk and she hated to appear niggardly. Nevertheless—

"You're with us, of course, Carmelita dear?" Lucy was taking it for granted.

There was nothing to do but smile acquiescence.

Carmelita was in the tonneau of the first of the three cars composing the cavalcade that descended upon the peace and quiet of Canary

Cottage. Beside her was Rao-Singh and in the front seat was Lucy, driving swiftly and expertly, with Roy Daly chattering into her unhearing ear. Mrs. Hodge had made sure that Jack and his adored blonde were in the next car behind. Lucy's low, racy runabout swooped up and over and down the short, rolling Long Island hills until finally she swept it between a pair of sentinel pines into a wide, curved, bluestone drive and in front of a dimly lighted colonial mansion. It was a residence of much dignity and no little charm, resembling Jefferson's home at Monticello more than it did a society gambling resort.

Rao-Singh had hardly said three words to his seatmate during the ride. Carmelita had been noting his rather striking profile in the moonlight, his moody eyes, his thin yet sensual lips. He was a handsome, full-blooded creature, the sort of a man who might stir the pulses of almost any woman even though the major part of the fascination might be fear. The scrupulously proper manner in which he had treated her lowered the bars upon Carmelita's early fears.

Lucy dropped her guests at the entrance, parked the car down the drive among several other machines, and rejoined the trio. As yet there were no signs of life from the other side of the heavy, white door.

"It is like a Poe mystery yarn, isn't it rather?" Lucy laughed. "Rao, you are the most appropriate one to open the Palace of Chance."

Rao-Singh advanced gravely and beat three times sharply with his knuckles upon the door, following it with two longer blows. At once a small panel which had not been noticeable before and which was about on a level with their eyes, was shoved back and a hard, thin face peered out at them. A grudging look of recognition spread over the sardonic countenance and in a moment the door was pushed cautiously open.

CHAPTER IX

They immediately stepped into another world—brilliant lights, ice tinkling against glasses, a fog of tobacco smoke, and the low, monotonous voice of the bankers at the two roulette tables in the high-ceilinged living room opening from the foyer hall. There were possibly a dozen people, mixed men and women and for the most part rich New Yorkers from the neighboring summer estates, already at play when Lucy's party arrived. Lucy led the way to the least heavily patronized table. The thick-jowled, gray-haired proprietor nodded to her as she passed but not without bestowing a searching glance at her companions.

Lucy's party watched a turn of the wheel in silence. The thin voice of the croupier, silence, then the swish of the disks being drawn toward him. Rao-Singh bought two hundred dollars' worth of chips and pushed half of them toward Carmelita without a word. Her eyes were shining. It must be terribly thrilling to play and win.

"Try your luck," the Prince was suggest-

ing. "There's a hundred. Take my advice and place it upon 23."

Carmelita shook her head doubtfully. "No, I thank you. I really couldn't think of risking your chips. I might lose."

He shrugged his shoulders and tossed his chips to the banker to place upon the number which he had recommended. Then he drew out his jeweled cigarette case, supplied Carmelita and lit it for her, and struck a match for himself—all without glancing at the wheel as it spun. He hardly seemed to hear the banker announce that Number 23 had won but accepted his winnings indifferently.

"Rao is a wizard on the wheel," Lucy declared with as near a flash of admiration as she ever offered. "A few more trips here with him and we shall be barred, I'm afraid. He is uncanny."

"Please tell me your secret," asked Carmelita, trying to say it lightly but interested in spite of herself.

"I could probably give you some mystifying answer," he smiled. "Because I am an Indian and come from a mystic land you would believe me. But really it is just luck—luck and a bit of mathematics and what you Americans call a 'hunch.' "

To prove it he risked the entire amount he had won upon another number. Again the

spin of the shiny spoke brought success to the Hindu. Three times he repeated this until it seemed as if he had cast some sort of a spell upon the game. The others of Lucy's party stopped playing to watch him, and Hayden, the usually impassive proprietor of the establishment, sauntered over to view this turbaned raider upon his bankroll.

It was Carmelita's first experience in such a palace of chance. It seemed so fascinating to be risking huge sums of money upon the fickle turn of a wheel. In the thrill of it she quite forgot that there might be a moral side to this, that the whole purpose of this elaborate ménage and its aristocratic patrons was outside the law. She leaned forward in her interest, pressing against the arm of Rao-Singh, watching his every action. Lucy and the others were all playing. Why not?

"Just try it once," he urged again. "I'll lend you a hundred—you can pay me back." She hesitated a moment, then yielded.

"Put it upon the odd group of three," he suggested. She obeyed. And in half a minute she had doubled the money and was offering the Prince back his loan. He accepted it without demur. "You haven't finished already?" he asked. And, once having made the plunge, it seemed to Carmelita that it was foolish to

A Paramount Picture. *The Cheat.*

"I'LL CUT THE CARDS WITH YOU. IF I DRAW HIGH, THE DEBT'S CANCELED—— IF NOT——"

stop. If she lost her hundred on the next turn she could quit and would still be even.

Rao-Singh's amazing foresight proved correct again and Carmelita again had the exhilarating pleasure of seeing the now somewhat worried croupier push the disks toward her. There was no stopping her now. The Indian gave up his own winning streak to coach her and even Lucy's dead eyes came to life as her guest's winnings rose. Again and again the banker pushed Carmelita's winnings toward her. They totaled over six thousand dollars.

"You must really try Monte Carlo next," drawled Lucy between spins of the wheel. "You would be sure to break the bank."

But at last Carmelita's luck began to turn. After two losing plays in succession Rao-Singh said significantly. "You are tired, are you not? At least it is better so. You will win no more to-night." She wanted to go on but she obeyed him.

Although the croupier was rather insistent that she continue and the suave Hayden expressed a quiet surprise that madame was stopping so soon, Rao-Singh drew her aside and asked the banker for her winnings. To her astonishment, for she had herself kept no accurate account of the score and was really playing more for the exultation of winning

than for the actual material gain, the cheque handed to Carmelita was for five thousand dollars.

"It is really yours," she said to Rao-Singh, offering it to him. "I played with your money and your good fortune. Please take it."

He held up a declining hand. "Not at all. Don't feel guilty about accepting it. They are taking many times that amount away from other people to-night."

As the Hodge party was leaving, Jim Hayden, owner of Canary Cottage, reserved a special bow for Carmelita at the door. "Madame will come again?" he invited. "Perhaps," smiled Carmelita but at the time she did not think that she would.

It was in the early morning hours when Lucy Hodge's Canary Cottage expedition reached home and Carmelita, tired from her strenuous day and night, excused herself and retired to her suite.

There, pink toes curled beneath her, she sat for a few minutes thoughtfully upon her bed, her eyes resting upon a small, framed photograph of Dudley which she had sentimentally thrust into her suitcase just before leaving home. He wouldn't approve of her evening, she knew. But she had had a glorious time. It seemed to her that life was somewhat topsy-turvy. The poor boy worked so hard to pro-

vide them with a bare living and here she had by hardly turning a hand accumulated practically his whole year's salary in a couple of hours.

Carmelita did not believe that there is any special virtue in money earned by arduous toil. In Wall Street, where Dudley spent his days, there were men making fortunes in a few minutes by much the same process as she had acquired this miraculous five thousand dollars. She picked up the check and experienced anew the delicious thrill which the unexpected possession of it gave her. The money had been taken from other people who could doubtless easily afford to lose it. And she needed money so badly.

There are times when yielding to temporary temptation seems the easiest and most natural act in the world.

In the end Carmelita kissed the photograph of her good-looking American husband and, snapping off the bed-light, went to sleep.

CHAPTER X

"I HAVE been lying awake thinking about you since nine o'clock, Carmelita, and I have concocted the most wonderful plan."

Lucy Hodge, clad in a cool morning gown, was sitting in a fancy wicker chair in Carmelita's dressing room while Carmelita enjoyed the luxury of having her hair done by the efficient Yvonne. It was nearly noon but it was Sunday and the Hodge household was just stirring into life. The warm sunlight was filling the room and Carmelita could turn to the right and look out where the placid blue waters of the Sound glistened invitingly.

"What is the marvelous plan, my Lucy?"

"Well, first, how much did you really win last night?"

"Five thousand dollars." There was a thrill merely in repeating it.

"My, you did have a streak of luck." Lucy seemed to be waiting for the maid to finish and leave.

Yvonne, with a final expert pat, completed her task and Carmelita, delighted with herself in the glass, beamed upon her image in sheer

exuberance of good spirits. When the maid had gone she turned to Lucy simply. "I have been lucky ever since I have been here, Lucy. I am lucky to have such a friend as you who can make me so happy and comfortable. But you are spoiling me, I am afraid. It will be hard to go back to a little two-by-four apartment."

"Why go back?" her hostess asked significantly. "Dudley is probably having a good time himself. He went to Greenwich, did you say? There are yachts and golf and pretty girls galore there."

"He went on business."

"They all say that."

Carmelita was willing to be indulgent. "You do not know Dudley as I do. He is strictly honorable, splendid, fine. You do not half appreciate him."

Her eyes were shining with her love and Lucy thought it wise to change the subject.

"Well, at least I'm sure he'll be just as keen for the plan I'm about to suggest as you will be. Here it is then: You have five thousand dollars. Well, Knowles, the real estate man at Hedgewood, was telling me the other day that there is a perfect love of a cottage a quarter of a mile down the Drive from here that's for rent. The people who have been occupying it have been unexpectedly forced to vacate

and they're willing to sublease, furnished, very reasonably. At least, reasonably for the way prices run out here. Now, why don't you take the place for the rest of the season? If Dudley is so crazy about working he can commute in to the city every day. It's only an hour."

Carmelita was thoughtful. "It sounds interesting," she admitted. How she dreaded going back into that oven of an apartment.

"All right. You hurry now and get dressed and I'll have the runabout out and we'll look the place over before dinner."

"Oh, I should have to ask Dudley before I did anything."

But Carmelita obeyed. If she only *were* able to spend the rest of the summer in this glorious country of sweeping, shaded roads and velvety grass, with the Sound near and the wrens waking one in the morning. It would be wonderful.

The offered paradise proved to be all that Lucy had pictured it. A nicely arranged brown stucco house with low overhanging imitation thatched roof, set amid spruces and blossoming shrubs and a flower garden of riotous color—Carmelita was captivated at once. True, it was not directly upon the Sound but she could dash over to the Hodges for her swimming and sailing.

Yes, the fussy male member of the family at present occupying the cottage said Knowles was right; they were getting out, forced to, and wanted to sublease. A thousand a month. That was absolutely the lowest. Three or four people had been looking at it. A party was to know definitely to-day; yes, he was quite sure this other party would take it. To-morrow would be too late, he was afraid; place would be gone.

Carmelita's eyes were shining. "Very well," she cried, with sudden reckless decision, "I'll take it." She could manage Dudley somehow, she told herself.

"Fine," said the nervous knickerbockered present tenant with much relief. "I'll get out my car if you like and we'll hunt up Knowles immediately. Don't suppose we can sign any papers to-day because it's Sunday but he can be getting them ready. To-morrow do?"

"Of course you can stay over," Lucy interposed to Carmelita.

Carmelita hesitated. "I suppose so." Dudley would get in late that night; she would telephone him that she was postponing her return a day.

"Can you make a little deposit now?" hinted the man. "It's customary, you know—bind the bargain and all that sort of thing."

"Why—" began Carmelita and then she re-

alized that she had no money with her. Lucy came to the rescue with the Parisian beaded bag which she kept in the seat of her runabout. It was stuffed carelessly with bills.

"A hundred dollars—that will be plenty, will it not?" in a tone that implied it must be. The man accepted it. And Carmelita was bound to her bargain in what seemed to her a mere twinkling of the eye.

It was not until they had located the brisk Knowles in his office and concluded the preliminary business with him and were on their way back to the Hodges that the thought occurred chillingly to Carmelita. "How shall I explain my sudden wealth to Dudley? I can never admit that I have been gambling."

"That's so," Lucy Hodge, intent upon her task of driving the car through the bustling activity of a typical good Long Island road on a typical summer afternoon, was yet turning things over in her agile mind. "Tell him," she suggested, "that your father has unexpectedly forgiven you and sent a check."

"I couldn't tell him a lie. Besides, how could I be getting mail here from my father?"

"Oh, don't let a little matter like explaining the money worry you. You'll think of something when the time comes."

As a matter of fact Lucy's prophecy was unexpectedly correct.

After Sunday dinner Carmelita declined an invitation to waste the perfectly delightful afternoon by playing bridge and instead joined Rao-Singh and the crowd that was going swimming. In her sleek California bathing suit she was a very striking figure but she enjoyed swimming as exercise rather than as a fashion show and it took the broad-shouldered Rao-Singh, as they sat legs dangling on the side of the Hodge raft, to tell her how beautiful she looked.

"Are you enjoying America?" she asked, ignoring his compliment and descending upon safer and more impersonal ground.

"Very much. And you?"

"Oh, I am a thorough American now," she cried.

"I don't know about that," he gazed at her calculatingly. "You are too full of dash and color and too much in love with life ever to be what they call here a 'one hundred per cent American.' Americans of your age are in love only with money. They do not fall in love with life until they have made their money and are old and it is too late. It is so foolish. One must be young to really live.

" 'Ah, my Beloved, fill the Cup that clears
To-day of past Regrets and Future Fears:
To-morrow!—Why, To-morrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n Thousand Years.' "

The familiar lines of Omar seemed doubly beautiful and doubly pregnant with meaning on the lips of this handsome, full-throated Oriental. Were he and the poet right? And were she and Dudley foolish to waste their youth in the hope of prosperity in an indefinite future? Carmelita was troubled. Nevertheless she answered lightly, "One can always make a case for materialism and soothe one's conscience with Omar. He is such a comfort—and such a false old prophet." And, rising quickly, her bare white legs twinkled up the ladder to the diving platform on the raft and she tried to clear the doubts from her head by a magnificent swan dive into Long Island Sound.

She waited until ten o'clock that night before telephoning Dudley, the last fifteen minutes in a debate with herself as to whether she should try to explain to him over the wire about the cottage she had leased and her plans for the rest of the summer. She decided it was more expedient to tell him face to face. She could explain better. Besides, despite the good time she had been having during the past two days and the endless activity with which her hostess filled her hours, she had missed her husband very much. She did not wish to spoil the deal for the cottage by going in to town the next day to see him but it would

seem good to feel his arms around her again —real soon.

She rang up their apartment and fortunately he was at home and answered almost at once. Yes, he had just gotten in from Greenwich. His trip had been successful. Well, the apartment wasn't exactly an iceberg. Going to stay another few days with Lucy?—H'mm. He come out to-morrow night?—well—he was missing her terribly—well—he guessed he could make it. Mail? A letter had arrived for her postmarked Buenos Aires—some law firm's name on the envelope. He would bring it along.

Rao-Singh drove Carmelita to the Hedgewood station the next afternoon to meet Dudley because he had particularly asked her if he might earlier in the day and she had not known how to refuse him. She was quite sure Dudley would be displeased and she wanted him in a good humor that day. But Lucy herself had suggested Rao-Singh's going and Carmelita could not very well decline and ask her hostess for the use of one of her own cars and chauffeur.

So the Hindu Prince and Mrs. Dudley Drake, spick and span in cool sport clothes sat side by side in a shiny roadster as the train rolled in. Dudley, somewhat dampened and fagged out from a hard, hot day in town,

brightened up as he stepped from the train and saw Carmelita. But he frowned at the sight of her companion. He could not believe his eyes at first.

Carmelita, determined to pass the scene off gayly, kissed her husband, and exclaimed, "I don't wonder you're surprised, Dudley. I had the shock of my life when I first saw Prince Rao-Singh at Lucy's. He should notify his old friends when he comes to America." She was doing her best to do the honors gayly, but there was a noticeable chill in the air.

Dudley bowed rather coldly and suffered a further decline in spirits when he saw that he was doomed to the rumble seat in back of the one in which Carmelita and the Prince sat. And the fact that she turned around and devoted herself exclusively to him during the fifteen-minute-ride to the Hodge house did not revive him completely.

Carmelita was the first out of the car and as Dudley and Rao-Singh stood together for a moment, the latter offered, "There's no reason why you and I shouldn't be friends, Drake, especially as we're to be neighbors. No doubt, Carmelita has told you that I was in love with her at one time also. But you were the lucky man—and all's fair in love. I hold no grudge."

The cheeky devil—once in love with Car-

melita indeed, thought Dudley and disliked him more than ever. There was something dangerous behind those beady black eyes. What did he mean by "neighbors"? Was the Prince about to move into New York? Dudley was so anxious to rejoin Carmelita that he thought little more about this at the time.

"I have nothing especially against you," the American said but made no advance to shake hands or follow up Rao-Singh's offer of friendship. The two men walked silently up to the piazza where Lucy received Dudley with moderate cordiality and some curiosity as to what he and the Hindu had been talking about alone.

In their room Dudley handed his wife the South American letter he had told her about over the telephone. Carmelita was excited at once. The name on the envelope was that of the lawyers who had handled the de Cordoba's affairs since she could remember. Was her father relenting? As if to bear this out, a check dropped from the envelope as she slit it open. Dudley stooped and picked it up without reading it. The amount, Carmelita saw, was seven hundred and fifty dollars. Then she read the letter and learned that the money was from the estate of her mother.

Theresa de Cordoba had bequeathed three thousand dollars to her four sisters, who had

not married nearly as well as herself. She had believed, of course, that her millionaire husband would take care of their daughter until she married wealth, probably Pablo Mendoza. Now one of the sisters, whom Carmelita had never seen, had died and her share, according to the will, was being forwarded to Carmelita.

Three days ago Carmelita would have considered it a godsend. It would have bought new clothes, replaced Laura with an efficient maid, secured untold pleasures. But now it would not pay for one month, the rent of this cottage she had fallen in love with and signed the lease on that very morning. Nevertheless —Carmelita was thoughtful—she must make some explanation of sudden wealth—she wondered if she dared—it was really a cheque and Dudley had not seen the amount—a small white lie at the most.

He was taking a shower-bath and she waited until, refreshed by the stinging cold water and the fresh linen he had changed into, he announced himself ready to descend to the Hodges and dinner. Rao-Singh, mercifully, Dudley thought, was not staying, and the rest of the week-end guests had departed that morning.

"Do you like this section of the country,

Dudley?" Carmelita began. "Don't you think it's perfectly darling?"

"Great," he admitted. "Wish I could afford a place down here. Some day we shall, Carmelita, if my present plans go through."

"There's the sweetest little place down the road a bit. Just ideal for us. I'm going to take you down to see it after dinner."

Declining Lucy's offer to provide a car, she repeated to Dudley after dinner the suggestion that they take a walk. He was not interested particularly in "the sweetest little place," but eager for air and exercise and relief from the shallow presence of the Hodges. So Carmelita and he strolled down the hedged road toward a very beautiful sunset. At the entrance to the drive leading to Carmelita's cottage she stopped while she extolled its merits. He listened tolerantly.

"It looks very nice," agreed Dudley, "but why are you so tremendously interested in the place?"

Carmelita hesitated, then plunged. "Well, I have a big surprise for you. It is ours for the rest of the summer."

"I don't understand." His voice was ominously quiet.

"Why, I've rented it—signed the lease today."

He looked at her in amazement. "But, my dear, you must realize that we can't afford a place like this—yet. It's ridiculous. I know something about what such houses rent for. They get a thousand a month for some of them. You must be joking."

There was a childlike pout upon Carmelita's flower-mouth and she came closer to him in the gloaming and fingered the lapel of his coat. "I'm not doing anything extravagant, dearest. I have the money. When you telephoned me that there was a letter home from my father's lawyers, I knew what it was. It was money due me from my mother's estate. More than enough to pay for this house for the entire season and give me much more besides. Why, I'm rich, Dudley. I had set my heart upon the cottage and when I knew I could afford it I went right out and signed the lease. So, you see, everything is all right."

But if she expected Dudley to be satisfied, she was doomed to disappointment. Strong pride was one of his characteristics. He had determined to make good in business for Carmelita's sake, and he would be soon, he felt now, in a position to give her almost anything she wanted. Just a few months more. Her family's wealth and his own pennilessness had been the only thing that had prevented him from telling her he loved her that first night

he met her in Paris. Was the de Cordoba money to come between them again now—when he would soon have so much of his own? Why couldn't she have waited? His lips became a thin, firm line.

"There is one thing a healthy American man can't do, Carmelita," he said slowly, "and that is, live on his wife's money."

Carmelita was vexed, exasperated as she saw her plans endangered, and her voice echoed this. "Oh, don't let your silly old pride spoil everything, Dudley. We can be so happy down here together and you can pay me back the amount of the rent later as far as that goes."

He looked at her with a whimsical smile. She was so like a petulant child who thinks the world will come to an end if one of her pet projects goes wrong. He put his arm affectionately around her. "I know it's been hard for you the past year, dearest," he said, "and you've been a very good sport about it."

"Well, I'm afraid I couldn't go on being a sport, Dudley, if I had to go back to that stuffy old apartment in this scorching weather when I have a perfectly gorgeous and cool home here that I've signed the papers for and couldn't get out of taking if I wanted to." Carmelita had ceased arguing. She was simply going to have her way or—

"Besides," she continued, "the money is mine and if I choose to spend it this way, I really don't see why I should allow you to stop me." In spite of her bravado, she knew if he came back with any sort of a flat ultimatum, she would yield.

Dudley was troubled and uncertain what to do. He had come down here eager to see her and to enjoy a tranquil evening and night by the Sound, and it seemed to him that he had come upon a crisis in their relations together. Here in this elaborate "cottage," in this environment of ease and wealth with the Hodges and Rao-Singh was the old world in which Carmelita had been brought up, to which she responded as a rose responds to the warmth and lazy sun of a hothouse. And back there in that scorching Greenwich Village apartment was the new world to which he had brought her, where she had learned to sacrifice the old world for her love. He hoped to take her soon from this new world of discomforts to a still newer world that would be her old world somewhat expurgated—comforts and luxuries but sans Lucys and Rao-Singhs. But now she wanted to slide back and he feared that in doing so she would slip away from him.

Luxury never seems so important as when we have had to abandon it for a time. He himself even now could feel the allure of it. He

had lived in Lucy's world himself in the days when he was spending every cent he could earn or borrow. He could see Carmelita's point of view. And, as she said, it was *her* money. The de Cordobas were tremendously wealthy. Doubtless the inheritance from her mother amounted to several hundred thousand dollars. He had not asked her the amount and she did not volunteer it. Dudley was uncertain what to do.

They had turned around and were walking back toward the Hodges, talking as they sauntered along. The sun had set and a full moon was rising over the high hedge that bordered the red shale road. Out on the Sound a yacht sounded eight bells. Dudley walked along a few minutes in silence.

"Very well," he said finally with the ghost of a smile, "we'll try it out. You go through with your lease and take the house. And I'll come out week-ends as sort of a regular guest." As he saw her about to protest, "Even if we took the place together and I were paying for it, as I feel I should be, I couldn't get out any oftener than that. I am frightfully busy at the office and it would take me nearly an hour and a half to get in from here."

"You'll really let me have it, then?"

He nodded. With a little cry of delight she put her arms ecstatically around him and

kissed him many times with no one but the austere moon to see. The rest of their walk back was occupied by Carmelita in enthusiastic recital of her plans.

"And I'll come up every few days to town and have lunch with you," she promised. He patted her hand at this as if to say, "Yes, of course," but he knew, with Lucy Hodge and her friends and all the other diversions in this delightful region, she would probably do nothing of the kind. But he was tired of bickering and was willing to do almost anything now to make her happy and contented. But there was Rao-Singh. He would be her neighbor also. For an instant Dudley's brow darkened.

CHAPTER XI

FATE is a careless stage manager. A scene-shifter could give her pointers. Usually her most important strokes lack utterly the element of the dramatic and have the appearance of the common-place. Such ordinary phenomena as missed trains, letters which did not get mailed and slips of the tongue frequently mark the turning points in human lives. A Broadway playwright would protest that there is no "punch" in such things. But in the theater of life the dramatic climaxes are not carefully arranged so that the audience can leave at eleven o'clock. The audience is not considered at all. Neither is the player who is for the moment in the star rôle. His lines are not told him in advance. He steps out before the footlights of life and Fate furnishes him with his cue. But whether, in following it, his actions and lines mark a crisis in the play, whether the critical point was reached in the first or last act, he generally cannot tell.

. . . . . .

It was a month since Carmelita had taken

the money won at Canary Cottage and used it to lease the elaborately furnished Sound-view "cottage" at Hedgewood. It was now a month since she had leased the cottage and Carmelita Drake was giving a birthday party at her charming Long Island country home. She was hesitating whether to place her husband or her closest other male friend, the society favorite, Prince Rao-Singh, at her side. A picture of loveliness in a red, velvety evening gown that set off her black hair and exquisite creamy skin in all its richness, she bent over the white napery of the table linen toying with two place cards.

Finally she decided it would be Dudley. She had not seen him in a week and, though it was not the thing in Lucy Hodge's and her set, who were to compose the other guests at her birthday dinner, to sit next to one's own husband, she felt that in this case she could make an exception, although it was true that Dudley was not lively company these days. He did not seem to be at home among her gay friends upon the occasion of his week-end visits and she knew that the arrangement under which they had been living during the month she had been occupying the country house and he had been staying at their Greenwich Village apartment alone, did not please him.

It was not alone the fact that he was em-

barrassed to be under a roof that his wife was paying for, although he resented this also. But the important thing was that Carmelita was changing, and he did not like it. He detected the influence of the fast crowd with which she was traveling. They were wasters most of them. Scandal seemed to be their chief diversion. And he had heard lately much talk of almost nightly visits to a society gambling resort called Canary Cottage, located nearby. "So-and-so made a killing in the Street last week and dropped it all at Canary Cottage the next night" or "No wonder the Stacey-Smiths have a new Pierce Arrow; look at the way they've been cleaning up at Canary Cottage lately" were samples of this kind of talk. Once or twice Carmelita and he had been invited to go along to this popular place and, with a quick glance at the person extending the invitation and then at him, she had hurriedly declined. Was there more in this than met the eye?

Yes, Carmelita was changing. She was once again the adorable, luxuriously gowned lady of wealth, it seemed, whom he had met and fallen in love with in Paris and once more in the gay world in which he had first met her. But she was yet somehow different. She seemed older, more determinedly gay, more sophisticated, and not quite happy. He had asked her if she

was worried about anything and she had quickly replied in the negative. Was it money? He had never questioned her as to the amount of money she had really received from her mother's estate. Certainly it must have been a very large amount, to pay for the butler and the maid and the rest of the extravagant establishment Carmelita was running. But, once having made his decision to allow her to spend her own money in her own way, he had not inquired further into financial details.

The truth was that Dudley Drake was now living in a state of sullen resignation that was not good for his piece of mind or his relations with his wife. He still loved her with all his heart. There were lonely moments when he longed for her madly and had wild impulses to dash out to Hedgewood and sweep away all the artificiality that bound her life there and which he felt was keeping them apart, and bring her back to what she had once called their "bird cage" to enjoy her for himself alone. Added to that was his acknowledged jealousy of Rao-Singh and the apparently increasing intimacy between the Hindu, now Carmelita's close neighbor, and his wife. Dudley could hardly hear the Indian's name mentioned without bristling. He could not bear to see them together. The fellow was

downright offensive, despite his wealth and his polished manner.

Carmelita had noticed her husband's growing restlessness and wondered about it, but she had other, sharper worries that occupied her mind now. Having settled the matter of the place cards by putting Dudley's next to her, with a silent hope that he would be more agreeable and light-hearted than he had been lately, she turned to find the butler with a letter for her. It bore a South American postmark and she opened it eagerly. The writing was in Spanish:

CARMELITA:

I am sorry to hear you are in trouble but I must confess I am not surprised. My decision which I cabled to you upon receiving word that you had disobeyed me and dishonored your name was final. I no longer regard you as my daughter and I refuse absolutely to send money to you. You must look to your husband for support.

DON CAESAR DE CORDOBA.

Carmelita's lips trembled. Then she walked over, letter in hand, into the living-room and to a little mahogany desk in the corner. From a drawer she drew out a formidable heap of unpaid bills—dressmakers', grocers', florists', and other tradespeople's—and stared at them abstractedly. No use looking at them again. That did not make them less.

She had a few days ago in desperation cabled her father for money, hoping he had by this time reconciled himself to her marriage and was perhaps eager to hear from her. And this was the disconcerting answer.

The bills were not the only fruits of folly confronting her, staggering as the amount of them was. She had been playing roulette three or four times a week for the past month at Canary Cottage, and almost from the start, ever since her initial lucky evening, she had lost. Hayden, the manager, held her I. O. U.'s for nearly five thousand dollars, the result of her frantic attempts to recoup her losses by playing for heavier and heavier stakes. Carmelita got little pleasure out of roulette now, but the game was the favorite with her crowd for the moment and she was expected to do as the others did.

Carmelita passed her hand distractedly over her forehead in a gesture of weariness. Well, this would never do. She was giving a birthday party within an hour and she would be, as usual, the gay and charming hostess. She turned to rise and then gave a little gasp of startled surprise at the presence of another person in the room. Prince Rao-Singh, in evening clothes, had entered noiselessly and stood a few feet from the back of her chair.

"Please forgive me for intruding," he said,

"but the door was open and there was no one outside to receive me." This was quite true. The butler was assisting the maid in the kitchen in the preparations for the dinner. Carmelita had risen, the bills and her father's letter clutched in her hand. She smiled a greeting.

He did not attempt to conceal his knowledge of what the papers in her hand meant. "Are you in trouble, Carmelita?" he asked quietly.

Her pride struggled with her desire to confide in some one. Then, "Yes. Here—read it." And she handed him her father's letter, turning her face away to conceal her concern. He scanned the note gravely.

"There is little hope there," he agreed, handing the letter back. "But I cannot endure seeing you in trouble. Will you not let me help you? I can lend you—"

"No, no—please," she cried in protest. He had started to draw his check book from his pocket and he now replaced it with a shrug of his shoulders. She did not see the look of thwarted satisfaction that clouded his face at her refusal. He was like a cat who is about to pounce upon a helpless canary and the bird suddenly flies away.

"You have not been fortunate at roulette either, have you?" he asked sympathetically.

"No," she admitted. "Hayden has been

after me to make good my I. O. U.'s but he will have to wait."

"If your creditors become unmanageable, Carmelita, remember that you can always depend upon me."

She thanked him doubtfully and said that she would remember. Then because he saw that he had gone far enough and the subject was a painful one for her to discuss, he led the conversation into new and gayer channels. He reached into a back pocket and pulled out a flat box—marked, she noticed, with the burnt-in head of the Bengal tiger that curiously branded all his possessions.

"I have brought you a little birthday remembrance," he announced. "If you will close your eyes—"

Carmelita, agog with interest, obeyed and he drew from the plush-lined box an exquisite necklace of pearls and slowly clasped it around her white neck. His hands trembled as they momentarily touched her firm, smooth flesh. His eyes were narrowed with emotion. He turned her gently toward the mirror which hung near the desk and announced to her that she might open her eyes. Carmelita uttered an exclamation of deep pleasure at the sudden sight of the glittering gems. Then she caught a glimpse in the mirror of the face of their donor, flushed and desiring and, frightened,

she turned quickly and started to unclasp the necklace with fumbling fingers.

"Your gift is very beautiful but it is far too extravagant. I could not accept it," she said confusedly.

"Please," he said, raising his hand as if to stop her. "It is merely a token of deep friendship—from my collection. It has been lying useless in its case and you are the only woman I know beautiful enough to match its brilliance. If you will not accept it as a gift, at least wear it to please me."

She hesitated. As they stood there close to each other Dudley, who had just arrived from New York, appeared on the threshold, a dusty bag in his hand. He was displeased at the tableau that met his eye. But the jealous flare that blazed in his eyes was controlled immediately and he said as casually as possible, ignoring the Hindu and speaking only to his wife. "Sorry I'm late—held up at the office —but I can dress in ten minutes."

Carmelita, feeling a little guilty, approached him with a welcoming kiss. Rao-Singh did not require the little nod from her to withdraw, and Carmelita, still contrite, accompanied Dudley arm in arm up to his room and busied herself laying out his things under the pretext of hastening his dressing. Alone with her he took her in his arms and tried to drown

his loneliness in the joy of once more having her close to him.

"You grow more beautiful every day, carissima," he cried, using for the first time in months his pet Spanish name for her. He held her off from him to admire her. It was then he noticed for the first time the necklace.

"A present?" he asked, indicating the jewels. She was trapped for a moment and her voice was a little uncertain as she uttered the lie that flashed into her brain: "Yes—from —er—Lucy and Jack." She could rely upon Lucy to help her out.

He seemed to be satisfied. But his face was a little rueful as he dug into his pocket and pulled out a small box. "I'm almost ashamed now to offer you *my* present. It's so insignificant alongside those pearls." He placed upon her finger a quaint antique ring of an Italian design. He had searched all over New York for a ring that would be out of the ordinary and the price he had paid for it seemed to him at the time to class it as one of his few extravagances. But compared with those perfect pearls resting upon her neck as if they had at last found the perfect setting for their rare beauty, his ring was nothing.

Carmelita was sincerely pleased with it however. "It was dear of you to think of such a thing," she beamed upon him. Then once

more the anxious hostess, "I can hear the others arriving below, Dudley. I shall have to dash down, and you must really hurry."

Though it was really not her fault, he was a little hurt because she had not lingered longer to admire her gift from him.

The last of the guests had arrived as Dudley appeared in the living-room. Except for a perfunctory greeting from the Hodges, they paid very little attention to him. It was a crowd in which husbands did not arouse much interest except from other husbands' wives. Dudley's good looks and well set-up appearance had won him attention from many of Carmelita's women hangers-on at first, but his lack of response had gradually led to a cooling of their ardor for him. He was quite evidently in love with his wife alone and not eager for further conquests. Hence uninteresting.

The men in the group were concentrating around Carmelita, and the swarthy Rao-Singh seemed to be a favorite with the women. The Hindu had the appearance of discharging the duties of a host in his own stead, Dudley thought. The butler announced dinner and he discovered to his agreeable surprise that he was to escort Carmelita.

"It is against all rules to be taken in to dinner by one's own husband but I see you so

seldom—I want you all to myself,'" she smiled, pressing his arm.

But Rao-Singh, seated at her left, monopolized most of her attention and Dudley settled into silence early in the meal, despite the efforts of the willowy Gladys Hodge, Lucy's cousin whom she had brought out of Terre Haute to introduce to Long Island society, to engage him in chatter.

CHAPTER XII

Carmelita had made few acquaintances among the people in the section of Long Island in which she lived who did not belong to Lucy Hodge's set. She had passed estates while motoring that fairly caught her breath with their well-kept beauty. The grounds around many of the castle-like houses were half a mile or more square in extent. Except for gardeners she had noticed few signs of life around them and she had often speculated as to what sort of people lived in these paradises which resembled in many respects her own father's establishment in the Argentine.

She had ventured to ask Lucy about this upon more than one occasion. Usually the latter passed her inquiry off with a sniff and a frivolous answer that meant nothing.

But once Lucy really took the trouble to explain, "Well, our crowd is fairly new to this section and I guess nobody can compare with us when good times are concerned. But there is an older society crowd here—stuffy old frumps for the most part who rather turn up their noses at us, I fancy, and think we're driv-

ing Hedgewood to rack and ruin. Jackie's people were anxious to have us get in with the old crowd and we did attend two or three of their parties. But they were insufferable and I put my foot down.

"Mrs. Willis Peabody, wife of the president of the Traders' Trust, and Mrs. John Hurd, whose husband is the big soap man, are the social leaders at present, so I'm told. They are respectable as Methodist bishops—no end of money and no way to spend it. You've seen their homes—a mile or so back in the country on the Huntington road." Lucy took a deep inhale of her cigarette and flicked the butt into the rim of flowers just below the level of Carmelita's piazza. "Why do you ask, my dear? Thinking of forcing into the gates of respectability?"

Carmelita smiled a disclaimer. Despite the derogatory way in which her friend spoke of the Peabodys and Hurds, there was still a little note of envy and respect in her voice. Lucy Hodge was not unaware of the value of social prominence and well-established family connections.

Carmelita recalled this conversation with Lucy with interest one afternoon about a week later when, following her daily swim with Rao-Singh, she was spending the time until dinner writing a cheerful letter to Dudley. She

looked up as a dark blue limousine swung into the drive and up the path and stopped in front of the piazza quite near her. A smart chauffeur alighted and held open the door and assisted a rather distinguished looking woman of about forty-five to alight. The new-comer looked around with lively interest and, seeing Carmelita upon the piazza, asked, "Does Mrs. Drake live here?"

When she was assured that she was in the presence of Mrs. Drake she turned and spoke to some one in the tonneau of the machine. Presently a slightly older and more fragile lady alighted, with the chauffeur's arm assisting her, with considerable dignity from the automobile. Both then came up the short path leading to the piazza with the assurance of people who are used to being welcomed everywhere. Carmelita was puzzled. She could not recall ever having met either of them before.

"I am Mrs. Peabody—Mrs. Willis Peabody," announced the taller of the two ladies. "And this is Mrs. John Hurd."

Carmelita, all a-flutter, recalled Lucy's words at the sound of their names and pushed her best porch chairs toward her guests. "Please sit down."

"You will pardon us for calling upon you so informally," said Mrs. Peabody pleasantly,

"but there is a little matter in which I think you can help us and at the same time do a very valuable aid to a very worthy cause."

Carmelita was all interest.

"Every year since the war we people of Hedgewood have been giving a lawn fête for the benefit of the disabled and wounded veterans of the late war. It has grown in the past few years to be quite an elaborate and complicated affair, though, of course, the increased receipts realized make it worth quite all the trouble it entails. This year we want to exceed all records if possible. Our first problem was to secure the proper location upon which to hold the Fête. We felt that it should be upon some site adjoining the Sound so that we might utilize the water for the decorated floats and other features. That precludes using the homes of either Mrs. Hurd or myself. Besides it is so much cooler by the water. Last year we used the grounds of Mrs. Thomas Hillary and found them quite ideal. Mr. Hillary's estate, as you probably know, is now occupied for the summer by Prince Rao-Singh."

Mrs. Peabody cleared her throat. Although her words were couched in as friendly a tone as one could imagine, yet she did not seem to be regarding her present task as an altogether pleasant one. Calling upon ladies to whom

she had not been introduced and of whose credentials she was not quite certain was far from her usual social usage. But she regarded the cause which she represented more important than any personal inconvenience and the friendly reception given her by Carmelita and the whole-hearted interest she was showing were reassuring.

Carmelita, at the mention of Rao-Singh, began to catch a glimmer of what was coming. He had sent them to her.

"We have called upon Prince Rao-Singh," continued Mrs. Peabody, "with a view to securing the grounds for the Fête again this year and he has not only consented to our use of them but has agreed to coöperate with us in every way possible and to attend to the matter of decoration himself. He made only one condition. And that was that we persuade you, Mrs. Drake, to serve upon the committee in charge of the affair, which now consists of Mr. Howard Church, of the Traders' Trust Company, Mrs. Hurd and myself. We agreed to this at once and we are here to ask you to donate your services."

The proposition, aside from the distinguished source from which it came, appealed to Carmelita at once. For the first time since their acquaintance she felt unreservedly kindly toward Rao-Singh for having introduced her

name into the matter. It would be great sport. Color and costumes and crowds and excitement appealed to her instinctively. She would enlist all of her and Lucy's friends in the cause. She could induce Lucy to bring theatrical stars of her Broadway set down and make use of their talents. It would offer her bored and novelty-seeking coterie something new to do and she was sure they would coöperate for that reason.

She was keenly sympathetic for the cause for which the Fête was to be given also. She had spent the years of the war rather secluded in her father's house at Buenos Aires where the gigantic struggle loomed up merely as headlines in the newspapers. Carmelita's real interest had started when America went into the fray, and she had caused some uneasiness among the small coterie of Spanish aristocrats in which she moved socially because of her intense enthusiasm for the Allies. The families of most of her friends in Buenos Aires were Germanophiles. Carmelita, with her American education and Allied sympathies, was looked at rather askance and one more item was given to Don Caesar de Cordoba to worry about.

Carmelita's first-hand acquaintance with the war had come when she met Dudley. He had fought with the French Air Service before

his country declared war and then became an American ace. In his left shoulder he carried a souvenir of one of his air combats. Carmelita was proud of his war record. In the American colony in Paris he still enjoyed, five years after war, a reputation, and this had helped to pique her interest in him when they first met.

Two or three times Dudley had brought to the apartment friends who served with him as aviators—once, she recalled, a slight Frenchman named Major Potel, with one arm, a man who had brought down twelve German planes in the course of his air career and who was yet so bashful that he could not look her in the eye without blushing. Carmelita had never been so gracious as to these guests and she had hung upon their conversations with Dudley as if she were listening to the gods on Olympus.

Carmelita's attitude toward war was the contradictory one that most people have. She thought war romantic and yet she shuddered at the fruits of war—the dead and wounded.

For several reasons therefore the chance to assist in the Benefit Fête appealed to her instantly. Even before she spoke her answer to Mrs. Peabody she was busy with swift-forming plans.

"I should be delighted to serve," she said.

"That's fine, my dear," said the older woman with an inward sigh of relief that that was over. "Do you mind if Mrs. Hurd and I drive around again to-morrow afternoon at this time and talk our plans over with you?"

"Do by all means. But won't you stay and have a cup of tea now?" Carmelita tried not to make her invitation too eager. Mrs. Peabody had risen and Carmelita made a move to detain her by pressing the bell for the butler. "No, thank you, Mrs. Drake," Mrs. Peabody smiled. "We must really be hurrying along now. To-morrow perhaps."

So Carmelita rose reluctantly with them. Both shook hands warmly with her and she stood, a graceful, cool picture, leaning lightly against a pillar of the porch, watching the chauffeur touch the starter and slowly roll her famous guests away. She was a little disappointed because they had not invited her to one of their homes for the conference the next afternoon. What were those homes like, she fell to wondering—safe, protected, like her childhood home in Buenos Aires but without its coldness? Could she be happy in such a serene, unruffled environment, growing old according to a fixed, polite routine? She feared not.

Since he was evidently to take such a prominent part in the coming events, Carmelita in-

vited Rao-Singh to be present at the conference the next afternoon. She hoped, however, that he would not come earlier than the others. She preferred to have her meetings with him now when other people were present. As things turned out, he made his appearance at about the same time as Mrs. Peabody's limousine. He was a tall, straight, striking looking figure attired in a white riding suit and mounted upon his favorite black horse. He dismounted and bowed with extravagant politeness to Carmelita and her visitors and was content for the rest to occupy a wicker chair in the background and say little. His dark eyes rested constantly upon Carmelita, though, absorbed in the business at hand, she hardly seemed to notice him.

The date of the Fête was set for three weeks hence and Carmelita plunged into the preparations with all the energy she possessed. She seemed to be hoping to find in this excessive activity an opportunity to forget her financial troubles and her husband's discontent.

Carmelita was making use of the refreshing subterfuge of temporarily ridding her mind of unpleasant worry, by replacing it by pleasant worry. In the same way a business executive forgets the cares of business by burdening his mind instead with anxiety as to whether his golf game is improving or not. There is

also a way of drugging the mind by driving the body at such an energy-consuming rate that the mind is too tired to think. Carmelita did this also. It seemed to her that she was always riding at tremendous speeds in either Lucy's or Rao-Singh's motor cars or getting in or out of them. She solicited subscriptions to the Fête all around the surrounding country and among the tradespeople of Hedgewood and neighboring towns. There were innumerable errands to do.

It soon developed that the other members of the committee on arrangements for the Annual Hedgewood Fair and Fête for the Benefit of the Wounded Veterans of the World War were quite willing to allow Carmelita's pretty shoulders to assume the major part of the preparations for the affair if she wished them to. The local post of the American Legion had been enlisted in the cause and contributed a little money from their slender treasury and promised brawny arms and willing hands when the time came for their use. There were also contributions from Mrs. Peabody and Mrs. Hurd and their set, and Carmelita, by polite bulldozing and her popularity, was able to extract a respectable amount from her own crowd.

Rao-Singh's idea for the grounds was decorations with an Oriental motif since he could

himself supply a great number of pieces from his own possessions and serve as authority for the rest. During the ensuing weeks Carmelita, now virtually director-in-chief of the enterprise, discovered that one of the requisites of such a position when the purpose behind the affair is charity, is an unlimited personal purse. She early found that the expense money allowed her was not going to be nearly sufficient, considering the elaborate scale upon which Rao-Singh and she had planned the Fête. There were innumerable yards of awning canvas to hire, wood and carpenters to be secured at prohibitive prices to erect platforms, a famous jazz band to be lured from Broadway at a tremendous bribe and all sorts of other expenditures which Carmelita's slender reserve, already extended to the limit to take care of her household bills, would not endure. Rao-Singh's shrewd eyes soon detected the embarrassment which she was laboring under.

"I hope you will let me take care of incidental expenses which the funds handed over to you won't meet," he suggested. "I am really the one responsible for expanding our friends' original idea into something worthwhile and I really should pay for it."

Her protests were weak and easily over-ridden. The Hindu really had little interest in

the affair in its charity aspects. He had taken no part in the war himself, having, like most of the native royalists whose titles came down from the old Indian dynasties, no sympathy with the British Empire and its wars. Indeed Carmelita recalled rumors which she had heard in Europe that Rao-Singh's presence in Paris was due to difficulties with the British administration in India on account of his supposed alliance with the movement for Hindu independence. Certainly he had the Oriental's viewpoint in most matters, including sex, and his Oxford education had influenced his mind and external veneer without affecting his spirit.

Rao-Singh had donated the use of his wide and beautiful stretch of lawn leading from his house to the Sound for the Charity Fête for the sole reason that it would bring him closer to Carmelita Drake. That was the real explanation, and matters were working out excellently for him.

Perhaps because she was a little uneasy at the predominant rôle Rao-Singh was now playing in her present activities, Carmelita made an effort to enlist Dudley's aid in the Fête also. She explained it all to him when he came out to Hedgewood the week-end after the visit of Mrs. Peabody and Mrs. Hurd. She had been away on an emergency errand

in connection with the fair in Rao-Singh's runabout that Saturday afternoon and had missed Dudley's train and was not in the house when he arrived. It annoyed him further to see her drive up with the Indian, though the latter, observing Dudley's presence, made a graceful adieu at once.

Carmelita kissed her husband and fell at once to explaining the reason for her delay and the whole charity project. Dudley was won to it fairly easily.

"I knew you would help," she cried delightedly. "I was very proud to tell Mrs. Peabody that my husband was a veteran of the Air Service himself and would lend every assistance."

Dudley was sincerely glad that she was at last occupying herself with something worth while. He willingly consented to discharge the multitude of commissions with which Carmelita flooded him upon his departure the next Monday morning, and left feeling more cheerful than he had for some time.

CHAPTER XIII

It was the final evening, Saturday, of the greatest Charity Fête Hedgewood had ever witnessed. From the gayly decorated piazza of Rao Singh's villa to the waters of the Sound glimmering under a hundred lights the broad, smooth slope of the Hindu's grounds had been transformed into a scene out of the Arabian Nights. A broad grass avenue lined with striped canvas booths and tents and lighted with strikingly colored Chinese lanterns stretched from the house to the dock. There were fortune teller's tents, tents that advertised in lurid canvas posters the mysteries expounded by the Hindu fakirs within, booths where knitted goods, donated knick-knacks and even produce and fruit from the countryside was sold. Pretty society girls in Oriental costumes of odd batik design tried to cajole the crowd into open booths where they might risk small amounts on games of chance such as one finds at church bazaars. (Rao-Singh had inquired why he could not install roulette, with Hayden as croupier, but Carmelita turned that idea down.)

Near the water's edge a large dance platform had been constructed and decorated especially for the occasion, in the prevailing Oriental motif. A famous jazz band borrowed from one of the chief Broadway midnight-to-morning dance clubs offered a tumult of syncopation which all the dancers pronounced too wonderful to describe. At intervals the dance floor was cleared and stars and lesser celebrities of the New York theatrical world did their bits. The professional talent had been assembled by a remarkable young man named Grantland, lean and leather-lunged and seemingly everywhere at once. He was a sort of super-press agent for a chain of country-wide vaudeville theaters and boasted that he could induce any Broadway star to go anywhere. Dudley Drake had been the means of getting in touch with him through the fact that Drake and Porter were the financial backers of the concern for which he worked.

The water was aglitter with the lights of yachts and smaller power craft loaned by their owners for the purpose of selling rides at whatever price the passenger would pay "and no change given."

Outside in the deeper water several palatial yachts, aflame with light from stem to stern, owned mostly by the millionaire Peabody and Hurd crowd, slowly raked the gala scene with

their powerful searchlights. And above a glorious full moon shown, though there was so much artificial light that hardly anybody noticed the moon, and the paled sky was dotted with myriad stars. It was a scene of rare and exotic, man-manufactured beauty that it would have taken an aviator a thousand feet aloft truly to appreciate.

This was by far the most crowded and prosperous evening of the Fair. One could move about with difficulty on account of the masses of people. Mrs. Peabody and Mrs. Hurd and their quiet, well-dressed friends could be glimpsed mostly upon the fringe of the hectic activity. They had loaned the influence of their names, and their daughters with their carefully modulated clothes and voices were playing the rôles of salesladies at the refreshment and fancy articles booths. They had given their money to help defray expenses. But they did not feel called upon to risk being trampled under foot by taking a more active part in the scene.

Carmelita's and Lucy Hodge's crowd, more loudly voiced and dressed, were laboring hard to have a good time in their own way, patronizing everything, especially the mild games of chance, buying everything in sight, dancing with each other's wives and promoting their little private intrigues upon the stern-seats of

temporarily rented power boats. Many of them had supplemented the soft drinks sold by Miss Constance Peabody and the Misses Hurd with contributions from their own hip pockets.

Perhaps in the whole assemblage the element that was most thoroughly enjoying itself were the plain native Hedgewoodians from the village and the neighboring farms—calloused-handed laborers, clerks from the stores, commuting sons of merchants. This occasion seemed planned to order for them and they were as naïve and happy as children. To Carmelita, in whom there was still an element of child-likeness that responds to color and lights and din, and hence a sympathy with them, they had been a constant delight all during the week and she had done her best to see that they had a good time.

It had been a week of unceasing work and worry for Carmelita. Rain during the first three evenings of the Fête had cut the attendance down to a mere dribble and the receipts to barely anything. To-night it seemed that the affair was to be carried to success, but she was not happy. And the reasons were Dudley and her own guilty conscience.

He had arrived late that afternoon from the city laden down with last-minute bundles for the Fair which she had telephoned him to bring and she had snatched the time from her duties

to borrow a car from Lucy and drive it herself to the station to meet him. As soon as he stepped from the train she saw there was something wrong. His kiss was perfunctory. She started the car, her warm welcoming smile extinguished by his manner, and asked him what was the trouble.

He stared straight ahead for a moment without answering and then, turning to her abruptly, asked, "Carmelita, you may think this a brutal question and perhaps I am a fool to ask it. But it is eating into my mind and I must: Is there anything between you and Rao-Singh that should cause gossip among people around here?"

She was startled. But she managed to say quietly, "I don't think I understand."

"I came down in the smoker and the two men in front of me—brokers I think they are, and I have seen one of them at Lucy's and at —your house—were talking about the summer crowd here. I heard them mention your name. I couldn't help it. They were talking loudly. 'Who is this alleged Indian prince, Rao-Singh, who has taken the Hillary place?' one of them said. And the other answered—a real nasty-mouthed chap he was—I should have liked a chance to smash him, 'The one who has the case upon Carmelita Drake?' And he went on to say with a sneer, 'I don't

know anything about his past. But all I can say is if I were Carmelita's husband I would manage to get down for more than week-ends and keep a weather eye upon the dark lad.' "

She sat at the wheel, attending strictly to her driving, eyes hard and straight ahead. He wondered if she had heard what he said. She finally said calmly: "Dudley, there isn't a person in the world who isn't gossiped about at some time or other. There are filthy little beasts who can always read dirt in anything. But I really thought my husband cared more for me than to believe smoking-car talk about me. Rao-Singh is my neighbor and has been working with me on this Charity Fête. Naturally we have seen a lot of each other. You know everything about my relations with him since I first met him, because I met you at the same time."

But he was not quite satisfied. "Very well," he said with some heat, "you have been frank and I believe you. I'll be frank too. I hate this Hindu from the bottom of my heart, have hated him ever since I first saw him trying to make love to you in Paris, when I was in love with you and afraid to say so because I thought I had no chance. I hate him and I do not trust him. And he hates me. He is like a very clever snake working in the dark

and he will strike at our love some day, Carmelita. I don't think he has given up wanting you. I want you to promise me to have nothing more to do with him."

Her cheeks were burning with insulted pride. Why was he sitting here talking to her, Carmelita de Cordoba, as if she were a very small child unable to take care of herself? This man he was maligning was her friend. True, she did not like Rao-Singh especially and she did distrust him a little, at times. But as for Dudley believing a slimy piece of men's gossip about her and Rao-Singh, working himself into a passion over it and giving her orders upon the strength of it—

She turned upon him, lips twitching with rage, and snapped, "Nonsense." They were swinging in front of Carmelita's cottage and before he could go further with the matter she had stopped the car and was flashing up the steps of the piazza without a backward glance at him. He sat for a moment in the seat of the runabout and then slowly followed her, but to another room.

Carmelita, thoroughly angered, could banish her commonsense and do almost any foolish thing. Carmelita, pride deeply wounded by the one man she loved and already taut nerves rasped by what she considered his implied accusation, could yet mask her feelings under an

outward show of spontaneous gayety and recklessness.

Such was the Carmelita of the last memorable night of the society Charity Fête upon Rao-Singh's lawn.

Cheeks flushed with excitement and a peach-colored evening gown accentuating the beauty of her body and a head-dress of jewel-studded metal cloth setting off the perfect oval of her dark Spanish loveliness, she stood chatting gayly in a circle of her friends who were resting temporarily from their excursions into the mulling crowds. Lucy and the others had taken little interest in the Fête when it was first planned and Carmelita was first trying to enlist their enthusiasm. "Charity is such a beastly bore when such a noise is made about it," Lucy had commented. "Why cannot Mrs. Peabody and her well-born ladies give their money to the wounded soldiers without asking us all to give up perfectly good evenings to mixing around with a lot of dusty, staring village people? It's so much simpler." But in the end they had decided that it really promised fun and they had in the past few days come out strongly in support of the Fair. They now confined their knocking to good-natured gibes at Carmelita as a member of the managing committee.

"Your jazz band is petering out, Carmelita,"

Jack Hodge remarked. "Perhaps I should slip down and lend the leader my flask or something."

"It's the band from the Rendezvous, Jackie," she countered. "You should know by experience that they do not get really good until about three in the morning. But perhaps if you present another fifty dollars to our treasury, I could do something."

"You might dance with me—that would inspire them," he suggested, with an admiring glance at her. By jove, he always knew she was a corker, but to-night she was absolutely devastating.

And Jack Hodge was an excellent judge of pretty women. She consented and was about to plunge into the crowd toward the dance platform with him when a gray-bearded man hailed her from the top step of Rao-Singh's lantern-hung piazza. He was Mr. Howard Church, the only male member of the arrangement committee and a prominent New York banker whose duties, now that the receipts for the week were almost all in, had just commenced. He had come from the study of Rao-Singh's house, which the Indian prince had set aside for the committee to use that evening as an office.

"Will you step in just a moment please, Mrs. Drake?" he asked and with an apology to

Jack Hodge she obeyed. She returned to them about five minutes later.

"Mr. Church tells me we are still five thousand dollars short of our quota and the business of the evening is about over." She looked around among them for a likely victim. "Well, who's going to save the honor of the dear old committee by, what do you Americans call it, 'coming across'?"

"Well," drawled Jack for one, "the evening, as you say, is drawing late and personally I'm broke."

The others indicated that they were in a similar state. Carmelita cajoled a while but she soon saw it was no use. They had really spent all that they intended to. There *was* a limit.

"All right," she cried, "if you haven't money, perhaps some one can offer a suggestion how we're going to get this five thousand within the next and last half hour. Because it will be Sunday in half an hour and the good folks of Hedgewood will disperse to their homes." Silence. "Who'll raffle off his Rolls-Royce, for instance?"

"Why don't you do something brilliant yourself, Carmelita? It's your funeral," drawled Lucy Hodge.

"For example?" Lucy was stumped for an instant.

"Well, I have heard of pretty ladies selling kisses and getting all sorts of prices for them —for charity's sake, of course."

The others insisted at once that here was an excellent idea though they hardly expected Carmelita to agree.

"I dare you, Carmelita," Jack Hodge cried. And that was what eventually fetched her.

"I'll do it if you'll make the first bid, Jack?" she flashed at him. He shouted assent. "All right. Come on!" She led the way toward the dance platform. In the wake of the crowd of her fellow conspirators Prince Rao-Singh walked more slowly than the rest and he seemed to be smiling to himself, if one could ever distinguish any emotion upon his inscrutable mask of a face.

Meantime Dudley Drake had been sitting alone in Rao-Singh's study. Mr. Church, who believed in functioning in an executive capacity exclusively even in his charitable pursuits as long as he could find a subordinate to do the actual work, had discovered Dudley standing moodily a little apart from Lucy's boisterous circle and had promptly requisitioned him. "Ah, Drake," he had hailed him, recognizing him from his occasional visits to Drake and Porter's offices as his friend Sanford Drake's chief assistant and nephew, "come in and give me a hand with this accounting business, won't

you?" Dudley had hardly dared refuse and Church, having installed a capable man behind Rao-Singh's ornamental flat-topped desk, had promptly disappeared to a more congenial and lively atmosphere.

Dudley looked with intense distaste at the mass of papers in front of him. His eyes wandered to the odd furnishings on the desk top, mostly of ivory and ebony and of fantastic design. Among them was a heavy circular disk with a handle upon it. Dudley picked this up with absent-minded curiosity. Upon its surface was the head of a glaring Bengal tiger with some words in an Indian dialect under the beast. He recalled seeing this burnt into Rao-Singh's stationery, his saddle, everything that belonged to the Hindu. It was his personal seal and the follow seemed to take an almost fanatical pleasure in branding all his possessions with it.

Well he supposed he would have to accommodate Church and inject some sort of order into these scattered memos and bills dealing with the Fête. In search of a pencil he opened the long drawer of the desk with some hesitation. He was not surprised to find a long, businesslike looking revolver in one corner. That was quite in character. Rao-Singh would be sure to have a gun. Near it was a small picture frame lying face downward.

The back of the frame bore the tiger seal of its owner. Dudley turned it over and instantly his face became livid with anger. It was a snapshot of Carmelita and Rao-Singh standing upon Lucy Hodge's raft together in bathing suits. The pose was innocent enough. The picture had probably been taken by Lucy and either she had given it to the Hindu or he had stolen it.

But the seal on the back! Whether or not there was any symbolism intended, whether Rao-Singh was thus indicating to his own mind at least that Carmelita was his, Dudley saw instantly an insulting significance in the presence of the burnt-in seal on the picture. He seized the frame and ripped out the film and thrust it into his pocket. He sprang from his chair and walked up and down the room for a few minutes trying to pull himself together. The talk in the smoking car, this picture—damn him!

CHAPTER XIV

When Dudley walked out upon Rao-Singh's piazza he saw that the immediate foreground below was deserted and the crowd was massed solidly down near the dance platform. As he strode in that direction he caught sight of Carmelita standing upon the platform alone while all eyes from below were turned upon her. She was haranguing the crowd in a gay, excited voice. He came near enough to listen, hardly knowing what his torn feelings toward her were.

"You've all had a good time to-night," she was telling the mass of grinning faces below her, "and it's been quite profitable for our cause. But you know we have had bad luck with the weather during the early part of the week and our total proceeds are below our expectations. We are determined to bring them up to the quota." The crowd massed in front of her seemed to lose interest at this point. At first her presence there, flushed and very lovely, had piqued their curiosity. But now they sized up her mission as an ordinary request for more money.

"We are five thousand dollars short of the amount we have set, and I am here to collect it," she went on. Then, taking a deep breath and coming bravely out with it, "What am I bid for a kiss?"

There was a surprised moment of silence, then a buzz of comment, and "A hundred dollars!" from Jack Hodge.

She frowned at him. "Much too low, Jack, old thing," she chided him. "Five hundred dollars," was Henry Church's bid, followed by a hurried explanation to his wife standing by his side that he was merely trying to help the good cause along.

At Carmelita's announcement of the kiss auction Dudley, just arrived in the midst of the crowd, could hardly believe his ears. He had a mad impulse to rush up on the platform and carry her away. Then he heard a woman in front of him mention Carmelita's name and he listened in spite of himself. "Isn't she brazen?" the gossip was saying. "And her husband—one never sees her with him. She is always with Prince Rao-Singh, that dark, handsome fellow over there. I wonder if she is planning a divorce." And her tall, hawk-nosed companion answered, "I don't know. She is the daughter of a fearfully rich South American, I understand, and her husband hasn't a penny. They say he is living on her

money and she is Rao-Singh's—" Dudley was red with anger. He would have vented the full force of his accumulated wrath upon them had he not been attracted again to Carmelita's unnaturally excited voice from the platform.

"Only two thousand dollars for a kiss? We simply must make up that five thousand. What am I bid then for a kiss and a dance?"

Suddenly almost at Dudley's elbow came the deep voice of Rao-Singh, "Five thousand." The crowd cheered. Lucy and her intimates looked at Carmelita with intense curiosity. Would she go through with it? She had turned a little pale at the Hindu's voice and tried to go on with the bidding, "Five thousand—are there any further bids?" But the quota had been reached and the crowd was now in the mood for the consummation of the excitement rather than for further competition. She tried for a few minutes longer but it was no use and she announced with assumed pleasure, "Sold then! One kiss and a dance for five thousand dollars—paying in advance."

At once Rao-Singh, a faint smile playing around his thin, cruel mouth, came toward the platform and vaulted lightly over the rail to Carmelita's side. Without a word to her he took out his check book and rested it upon the top of the piano belonging to the orchestra and

wrote out a check for five thousand dollars. This he handed to her and stood expectantly. His eyes were narrowed and there was a look in them which frightened her. Oh, why must he of all these hundreds be the successful bidder, with Dudley probably somewhere in the crowd to see and misunderstand?

She held her hand out to him and said in a low voice, "Please be a sport, Rao, and only kiss my hand." But he would not heed the plea in her voice. "No," he said tensely and, approaching very close, suddenly wrapped his long arms around her, drew her to him and pressed his lips hotly against hers in a long, fervent kiss. She had to brace her arm against his chest and resist with all her strength before he reluctantly let her go. Her face was flushed and angry.

"And now the dance," he insisted. The orchestra broke into the lulling strains of the current waltz hit. Other couples started dancing also. But before Rao-Singh and Carmelita had taken two steps another figure vaulted over the platform rail and, laying hold roughly of Rao-Singh's shoulder, tore the Indian away from Carmelita and spun him around until he with difficulty prevented himself from crashing upon the floor. It was Dudley, beside himself with rage. He followed close upon the Hindu and, standing

nearly chin to chin with him with clenched fists, snapped out in a low, strained voice, "From now on you leave my wife alone or so help me, God—I'll kill you!" He seemed about to attack Rao-Singh anew when Carmelita, terrified and mortified at the same time, stepped between the two.

"Don't be a fool, Dudley," she said sharply to him. "A scene here will do no good. Think of the scandal."

There were many other dancers on the floor by this time and immediately around the excited trio there was a little buzz of agitation. But it had all taken place so quickly and the threat and Carmelita's appeal to her husband were in such low tones that few knew what was happening.

"You defend him then," Dudley turned to her, contempt in his voice. She touched his arm, appealing to him to understand. His eyes swept from her arm to Rao-Singh standing quite composed and with an expression in his cold face as if he regarded Dudley merely as a petulant boy. For a moment there was a silence between the trio as the orchestra went on playing the waltz softly and the dancers glided by with curious glances. Then Dudley, with a helpless shrug of his shoulders, removed Carmelita's arm from his and without a word walked down from the platform and away

through the crowd. Carmelita stood looking after him uncertainly.

"Shall we finish our dance?" asked the Prince, intending to ignore the violence that had been done him and to dismiss Dudley without further comment. There were tears of humiliation in her eyes. Without any warning or answer to the Indian's question, she turned abruptly and hurried after her husband. There was a short cut to her own house, where she judged he had gone, through the lawns of two neighboring estates. Breathless and disheveled she dodged past the shrubbery, over hedges, the moonlight lighting her path. Her only thought at the outset was to find him and force him to take her in his arms and reason with him. But such is human perversity and our reluctance to admit there is ever a just cause for being publicly humiliated that by the time she had reached the house she was quite sure he had done her a grave wrong.

He was standing in the living-room of "their" house, hands clenched behind him, staring out through the gay little curtains into the dark. He turned as, catching for breath, she flung open the door.

She waited to recover her breath, leaning against the door. Then quite composed and with dignity she said, "I have come for an apology, Dudley." But she could not go on

A Paramount Picture. *The Cheat.*

"THEIR MOVEMENTS ARE LIKE THE FIGMENTS OF DISTORTED THOUGHTS, TWISTING, CURLING . . . AFRAID TO RELAX . . ."

with it. "Oh, Dudley, how could you have humiliated me so before all those people!" she cried. If he would only hold out his arms to her and allow her to cry upon his breast.

"Humiliated you!" he said with a short laugh. "Always thinking of yourself. Have you considered by any chance the humiliating position you have been placing me in during the past two months?"

Carmelita's hope for a reconciliation abruptly vanished. She could admit to herself that she had done wrong but she could not hear it from his lips in that uncompromising, almost insulting voice. She dried her tears. Still leaning against the door, she confronted him with a dangerous flash in her eyes.

Once started, the pent-up emotions within him came to the surface in a devastating rush. He came nearer to her until she became actually afraid he was going to treat her as he had Rao-Singh. "Do you know what people are saying about you and me and your fine Hindu friend, Rao-Singh? Do you?" His voice was choked, lashing. "I have heard it many times—everybody is saying it—that he is your lover and I am a blind fool living upon your money!"

She felt as if every drop of blood had suddenly left her body. Her hand moved over her face absent-mindedly as if to ward off a

blow. But she tried to be sensible, even defiant. "And you are blind fool enough to believe them?"

He stood staring at her. Was he actually doubting her then! In an instant, with the wild look and swift movement of a wild thing, she clutched at his arm and asked passionately, "*Do* you believe them? *Do* you! Answer me!"

And he answered, "No! If I *did,* if I for a minute thought it was true, I would kill you both!"

She loosed her tight hold upon his arm and sank into the chair by the library table. For a few minutes he paced up and down the room, coming finally to a halt in back of her. She could not see his face, but it was twisted with his jealousy, his overwrought nerves.

"I don't think you have ever understood me, Carmelita," and his voice was now steady and quiet. "When I met you I was a rather muddle-headed chap with a vague idea of the future. I fell in love with you, and after we were married it seemed the sporting thing to do to settle down and work like a dog and make enough money to make you happy as soon as possible. I thought our love would be enough incentive for us to put up with what little money I was making, am making, until I could make good. I can see now that I was wrong.

You are young and beautiful and you don't want to postpone the good things in life. I don't blame you for being dissatisfied with what I had to offer. You were never meant for any other environment except the one you're in now.

"Some women are like some trees—they can't be transplanted. I once knew a very rich girl who eloped with her chauffeur at Newport. I was a good friend of hers and she told me with shining eyes about her romance and how happy she would be with him in a little house in the shabby part of town where he lived. In six months they were getting a divorce. I saw her afterward. She told me how during that six months she would walk blocks out of her way to avoid her former friends, how her mother smuggled money to her so she could have decent clothes. And the funny part of it was that the chauffeur wanted the divorce even more than she did. She couldn't cook potatoes any better than he could afford a yacht.

"Well, perhaps I'm a little like the chauffeur. I have my own wants. They're different than they used to be before we were married. I suppose it's selfish pride, but I want to feel a wife's dependence on me. I want to work for her, fight for her if need be, and when I come home at night I want to find her there

to welcome me. I'm fearfully old-fashioned and Victorian, you see. As it is you're not dependent on me at all. While I'm out here I'm like any weakling who has married a millionaire's daughter for her money. The money I give to you is a mere drop in the bucket compared to what you already have. I'm like a poor relative who comes to you regularly—as a week-end guest."

She sat tensely listening, twisting her handkerchief. He was unfair. He *must* be. She felt his hands grip the back of her chair. His voice choked.

"There is no use trying to escape it, Carmelita. Our marriage has been a mistake—from the start. It is bound to end badly for both of us. I shall always love you—but I am ready to give you your freedom—and your happiness—if you want it." He turned away so that she would not see how near sobbing he was. He must get out, away. And, seizing his hat from the window seat, he stumbled toward the door and out into the night before she could recover and stop him.

When she comprehended what had happened she sprang from her chair with a hurt cry and rushed after him with outstretched arms.

"Dudley! For God's sake, you cannot leave me this way. I love you—I—"

He was gone. She slowly shut the door and leaned against it to recover her strength. Then with the cry of a tired, beaten child she sank limply down upon the floor and, burying her head in her arms, sobbed as if her heart would break.

CHAPTER XV

THE first beam of morning sunlight found Carmelita still tossing about upon her pillow. Dudley's dramatic outburst and departure had thoroughly frightened and chastened her. Nothing in the world mattered now except proving to him that he was wrong, that their marriage could yet be a glorious success, that she was willing to make any sacrifice to assure that. There was one consoling thought: He had said that he would always love her.

She wondered bitterly if he would forgive her the lie upon which her life here in Hedgewood was founded.

The gods must laugh at the struggles of mortals to avoid admitting a lie even when it is the easiest way out of difficulty. Carmelita felt that she could die rather than go to her husband and admit her gambling and her debts.

She rose wearily and took a cold shower-bath to try and drive the ache from her head. She hardly touched the breakfast which her maid brought to her bedroom. She would start, she decided, by discharging her butler

and maid; she would give them two weeks' notice that very day.

Carmelita walked into the library and sat down before the desk in which the sheaves of bills, mute witnesses of the past weeks of folly, were resting in an inner drawer. She spread them out upon the desk and took up her pad and pencil. The total surprised and disheartened her. It was even larger than she had feared and she had not taken into consideration the five thousand dollar I. O. U. to Hayden. Hayden—how long could she count upon the suave, hard-eyed manager of Canary Cottage to delay the final reckoning?

And that afternoon, as if in answer to her question, a squat figure of a man, double-chinned and paunchy and dressed somewhat too loudly, walked up the blue-stone path and confronted her where she was trying to read *Vogue* upon the piazza before she was hardly aware of his presence. It was Hayden. She glanced around hurriedly and reassured herself that no one else was in earshot. He bowed and apologized for his intrusion. He could be very obsequious when he wanted to be and when he believed it paid. But there was a little ominous gleam in his small eyes. She had owed him his bill for a long time and he had heard rumors of impending trouble between the Dudley Drakes and, though the very

wealthy Prince Rao-Singh was apparently still her sponsor and best friend, it was the wise thing to do to see where he, Hayden, stood.

One had to be careful with this flighty, young millionaire set. They had a habit of playing and not paying, of disappearing without leaving a forwarding address with the postman. Besides, Mrs. Drake had seemingly scratched Canary Cottage off her list as a place of amusement. He had not seen her there for several weeks. By making inquiries he had discovered that she was still in the neighborhood but he did not know how soon she would be going. On the whole, though his patrons did not usually care to have him invading their homes, he thought it expedient to come around and pay a business call.

Carmelita sensed uneasily what was coming as she asked him to sit down. He did so, his huge panama hat with the flashy band resting upon his knee and the remains of a brightly-banded cigar between his fat fingers. He mopped his brow at intervals. He had walked the mile from Canary Cottage and he was not the build which weathers the heat well.

"Haven't seen you at the Cottage lately, Mrs. Drake?" he started genially. She offered no comment. He got down to business. "Well, to tell the truth, I've come around about the little bill you owe us." He fumbled

in his inside coat pocket and drew forth the duplicate of the I. O. U.'s Carmelita had in her desk. "Can't win all the time, you know."

"I cannot pay you now, Mr. Hayden," she said. "You will have to wait." The man was very distasteful to her, aside from his unpleasant mission. Most people to whom we owe money are.

"You have owed us the bill for over a month now. I'd like to see it settled up." He was thrusting his stubby jaw forward now and showed signs of getting considerably more troublesome.

"If you will wait—" she began helplessly. Oh, why did these crises have to come all at once, without a chance of recovery between them? She was at her wit's end. She suddenly remembered the words of Rao-Singh that evening before her birthday party, "If ever your creditors become unmanageable," he had assured her, "just come to me." No, she couldn't do that—as a last resource possibly. That burning kiss the night before—even now it brought a blush to her cheek.

Hayden was speaking in a cold tone, "Then I am sorry, madame, but you force us to present the bill to your husband for collection. We don't like to do it and it may be very embarrassing to both of us—but it seems to be the only way out."

Carmelita stared at him wildly. The world was about to crash around her head now? No, no! "Please, please,—don't do that. Give me until to-morrow at least. I shall have the money somehow. Promise me you will let me have another day."

Hayden hesitated. He rose and twirled his hat a minute. Then he said, "Very well—to-morrow. If the money is not paid by midnight, I will have to go to town the next morning and call at Drake and Porter's." He hesitated again, seeming to feel that some explanation was due for his hardness. "Life is too uncertain these days in the gambling business, madame, to let bills run on. I hope you understand. And, personally, I think we have been pretty easy on you anyway."

With another bow he was off.

After a sparse luncheon Carmelita again sat down at her desk and spread out the bills in front of her and resumed her figuring. Then she started to take account of her resources. Dudley always left a check with her when he left on Monday mornings—a somewhat larger amount than he had been in the habit of allotting to her when they were occupying the apartment together. It was every cent he could afford, she knew. The last check was still there, intact. By rigid economy she could keep herself a week with it but it was a mere

drop in the bucket toward paying her other bills. She looked at it with a pathetic little smile. Poor Dudley. She pressed her lips against the paper whimsically. There was another check in the wall-safe, the five thousand dollar note from Rao-Singh, in payment of the kiss. Mrs. Peabody and Mrs. Hurd had promised to drive over the following morning, Monday, for a final settlement of the receipts from the Fête and she was to deliver Rao-Singh's check, together with other smaller, miscellaneous receipts in her possession to them then.

Carmelita held Rao-Singh's check in her hand. It was made out to "Cash" and signed with the cramped English writing of the Hindu. Her cheeks still burned with the thought of what it had bought, and cost her. Suddenly a mad idea flashed through her brain and, though she tried to dismiss it, it recurred to her constantly all through the afternoon. She had replaced Rao-Singh's check in the safe but the picture of it as a life-saver was continually flashing into her troubled brain.

It seemed to her to open a road out of her difficulties—a risky, thorny road to be sure, but perhaps worth the chance.

Lucy Hodge had invited her to a party at her house that evening in honor of the group of internationally famous tennis players who

had just finished the annual tournament over at the Hedgewood Country Club. But she felt that she could not enjoy any sort of party in her present state of mind and during the afternoon she telephoned Lucy and pleaded illness.

"You are not letting last night's little fracas worry you, are you, my dear?" came the cool drawl of Mrs. Hodge over the wire. "You are very foolish if you do. Better come over, well or ill, and forget your troubles. There are some awfully nice, handsome boys coming. Rao-Singh asked me particularly if you would be on hand."

But Carmelita stood by her white lie, which was, after all, partly true. She did not feel well. Her head throbbed. Besides, she could not face the curious, all-seeing eyes, the wagging scandal-tongues of Lucy's set. And particularly she could not face Rao-Singh after the kiss which had revealed his dangerous feelings toward her.

After her dinner alone that Sunday evening Carmelita sat for several minutes thoughtfully over her coffee. Lucy's crowd would all be at the Hodges'. It is always comforting if one is able to think in the midst of grave difficulty that taking one more step in the wrong direction cannot make matters worse and may be just the trick that will save the day. It was

such reasoning that led Carmelita to her decision. Once the decision was made, she acted calmly and swiftly.

She arose from the table and, going to the wall-safe took out Rao-Singh's check for five thousand dollars, which she was to deliver to Mrs. Peabody and Mrs. Hurd in the morning. She telephoned for a taxicab from the village and when, dressed for the cool night air, she reappeared downstairs, the cab had arrived. Rao-Singh's check rested in the beaded bag which she carried on her arm as she stepped into the machine, without having left word with her servants where she was going. "Canary Cottage," she told the driver.

Hayden's palace of chance was having a pretty dull evening and the proprietor was not in sight when Carmelita gave the signal and was admitted through the familiar door. She was anxious to avoid being recognized but there was no need of caution. A swift glance around showed nobody whom she knew—a few "sports" from the village who were talking loudly and spending little and three members of the Little Neck actors' colony silently playing roulette at a table in the center of what had been the palatial living-room of this once sedate old mansion. In the next room a fairly large mixed party of men and women were evidently making their first visit, judg-

ing by the noise they were making and the look of polite disgust upon the face of the banker.

Carmelita felt that she would be less conspicuous with the large party. Perhaps there was also within her the secret thought that here were other women gambling, women as foolish as she, a faint attempt even to deceive herself that her action was something different from the desperate enterprise that it was.

Carmelita arraigned herself alongside the players, and so intent was each one upon the game that at first they gave her hardly as much as a curious glance. The thin, hard, puffy-eyed banker shifted his eye to her for a second. But he had never seen her before and he was, she was grateful to discover, new to the place. She had feared to come upon Hayden and have him demand the whole five thousand dollars in payment of her Canary Cottage debts when she presented the check for cashing. That would never have done. She was relying on paying all her debts with this one sweep of good fortune, wiping her slate of worries clean, and going back to Dudley with a light heart and untroubled mind. She had simply borrowed the five thousand dollars entrusted to her care and belonging to the charity funds to use as an initial stake in her venture and

she could easily replace it from her winnings. After all she had been responsible for the presence of the check among the proceeds. Her beauty, her gameness, her daring had brought Rao-Singh and his wealth into the bidding. Who had a better right to borrow it now—temporarily? Desperation is a ruthless persuader.

She saw that the stakes the strangers at her table were playing for were high. Very well. Little ventured, little gained. "Give me a thousand dollars in chips and four thousand in cash," she instructed the banker and presented her check. He glanced at the signature and back to her with cynical interest. He knew Rao-Singh by name and his checks were honored in the place. Also that the Hindu had a weakness for white-skinned women. Another of his string? A beautiful prize, but they all fell—

He produced the disks and a roll of bills and pushed them toward Carmelita. She took a deep breath. Now for it! She must win!

And at the first few turns of the wheel she *did* win. The polished spokes flashed. "Fourteen," the banker announced in his monotonous professional voice and Carmelita had doubled her thousand dollar risk. Twice more she won. But the laws of chance are immutable, and the fate that had seemed to pursue her

during the past few weeks began to take its toll.

Two more spins of the wheel and she had lost her winnings and her original stake and was obliged to cash another thousand dollars. She rubbed her hands nervously. The others seemed to sense that a drama was being played out before them, with this beautiful, exquisitely dressed stranger and that relentlessly spinning roulette wheel in the chief rôles. They neglected their own play to observe the swiftly approaching dénouement. Could she stave off disaster or would she go under with her last dollar?

The second thousand was swept away and Carmelita, whitefaced, cashed the remaining three thousand and determined to risk it all upon a combination of three numbers that promised a return of five to one if she won. Fifteen thousand dollars—enough to pay back the original five, make good her I. O. U.'s with Hayden and have left five thousand to dispose of the sundry other bills that hung over her. Fifteen thousand—or nothing!

With a nervous movement of both hands she pushed all her chips upon the chosen numbers and stood back for the verdict. Every nerve in her body seemed to be stretched to the snapping point.

"Are you all through?" asked the unper-

turbed banker of the other players around the table. There was no need to ask. A woman's fate seemed to them to be in the balance, though they did not precisely understand how, and they were content to watch the drama play itself to a close.

He hooked a long finger around the polished rod and spun it. Round and round it flashed, slowed smoothly down, and even before it came completely to rest Carmelita knew she was lost.

"The even combination," he announced and swept the disks toward him. Her entire fortune had been staked upon the odd.

Suddenly something seemed to give way within her. Fog was gathering in her head and she felt her knees sag. A stocky, gray-haired men next to her caught her under the shoulders in time to prevent her falling. He led her quickly toward a window and, despite the banker's swift caution not to open it, for safety's sake, with a mention of prowling motorcycle policemen, he raised the sash to admit the cool night air.

Carmelita recovered almost instantly. "I'm quite—all right—thank you," and she tried to smile. "If you will—just call a taxi for me."

Her benefactor did so and procured a chair for her and stood beside her, mercifully not

attempting a conversation, the fifteen minutes until a cab from the village arrived.

As she walked slowly toward the door, the cashier behind the polished mahogany desk was examining the name upon her check and he bestowed upon her back a wise little smile.

CHAPTER XVI

If misfortunes do not come singly, as the proverb says, they seldom come illogically either. They are generally linked up by the chain of cause and effect. There is an accident or a false step and the rest follows inexorably. It is a sort of House that Jack Built of grief. We are caught under a rolling snowball of Fate.

Had Carmelita been in a mood to reason logically and anywhere near as much interested in the past as she was in the future she might have traced her present gathering storm of troubles around the drop of rain that Fate let fall when she innocently yielded to Rao-Singh's suggestion and risked a hundred of his dollars that first night at Canary Cottage. That was the beginning. And now—

The Carmelita who came down to breakfast in her Hedgewood home the morning after the disastrous plunge with Rao-Singh's five thousand dollar check at Canary Cottage was a different creature from the radiant Carmelita who had first come to Hedgewood. She toyed over her grapefruit listlessly. The wrens

were chattering outside the open window and the placid waters of the Sound danced invitingly in the sun. But Carmelita was heedless of the fresh glories of nature.

So it was all over, she reflected. In an hour, with the coming of Mrs. Peabody and Mrs. Hurd, perhaps accompanied by Banker Church for Rao-Singh's check, disgrace would be upon her, Carmelita de Cordoba. Misappropriating funds entrusted to her. Hadn't she read in the paper of a bank clerk being sentenced to Sing Sing for ten years for that offense? She took a morbid interest now in trying to recall the details of the story. She shuddered. They would arrive on time, she knew. She looked around her wildly. Why shouldn't she run away before it was too late, disappear utterly? But there was Dudley. Whatever feelings he might be harboring toward her now, as the result of Saturday night's fiasco, whatever he might have said to her in his anger about releasing her, she was bound to him always. She would never run away from him.

There was in Carmelita, even in this moment, a strain of Latin fatalism. Was it not droll? Here she was, daughter of one of the richest men in South America, until a year ago required only to express a wish no matter how extravagant and it would be fulfilled at

once. And now she was facing the crisis of her life because she could not anywhere in the world lay her hands upon five thousand dollars. Why, the trousseau she had bought in Paris for her expected marriage with Don Pablo Mendoza had cost three times that.

She could not go to the Hodges. She knew they had been running into a spell of rather straitened financial circumstances themselves, and, besides, even in their palmiest moments they would never have been able to produce five thousand dollars within an hour. Was there anybody within reach who could and would perform such a miracle for her?

And then she wondered why she had not thought of him before. Prince Rao-Singh. "If your creditors get pressing you too hard," had he not once said to her, "come to me." She had not liked the look in his face as he had said it, the expression that seemed to be cherishing the hope that some day she *would* be hard pressed and would have to go to him. And Dudley would never forgive her if he discovered she had appealed to the Hindu. But when one is desperate—

In her agitation she abandoned her breakfast and walked out into the flower garden in back of the house. The sturdy, squat-backed Italian whom she hired two days a week to take care of the grounds was weeding

the flower beds with deft, jerky movements of his strong wrists, whistling as he worked. He saw her, stopped long enough to smile a respectful good morning and to tip his dirt-stained slouch hat. Then back to work and whistling. Carmelita lingered, watching him idly, loath to go back into the house where she felt the final scene in her drama of disgrace was to be played.

She was in the garden when the familiar limousine of Mrs. Peabody swung up the drive and stopped in front of the door.

Carmelita, turning white in an instant, did not hesitate. Rushing up the shrub-lined path she hurried into the kitchen and caught her maid just as the latter was preparing to answer the bell.

"Tell them I am not here but will return directly," Carmelita gasped. "Be sure they wait."

Rao-Singh would have to lend her the money now whatever the price or the consequences. Or she would never come back to this house. She would—

Unobserved by the callers to whom the maid was now conveying her mistress' words and showing two chairs upon the piazza, Carmelita hurried over the broad lawns that stretched between her own property and that of Rao-Singh. Luckily no one observed her progress and in

ten minutes she was, out of breath, pounding the fancy knocker beside the screen door at the entrance to Rao-Singh's "cottage."

A dark, turbaned Hindu answered the door. Too well trained to register any surprise at the presence of a woman at his master's door at any hour of the day or night, he ushered her into the living-room and disappeared. Carmelita declined the chair he had offered her and shifted from one foot to the other for a few minutes. The Hindu servant reappeared and conveyed the message in broken English that his master desired to see the lady in his study.

Like Rao-Singh's apartment in Paris, this whole house was like a scene from another world. The Indian was a connoisseur of beauty, of rarities, preferably those with an exotic appeal. The floors were laid with oriental rugs that a millionaire collector would have given half his fortune for. A large bronze Buddha set into an altar-like effect seemed to blink at her from one end of the room. The walls were hung with tapestries and a few trophies of big game hunting in his native India. The place was somewhat oppressive and filled with the faint, acrid odor of incense.

And upon every one of his possessions she noticed somewhere the Bengal tiger brand

which had first met her eye in Paris. This branding—it seemed to be an obsession with him.

But she heard his deep voice calling to her from the study and presently he was standing in the doorway leading from that room to the living-room. "Please come in where we shall not be disturbed," he invited not without significance, and somehow she felt that he had guessed the object of her mission.

He motioned her to a seat in the study but she was too nervous to accept. Her eyes swept the room as she struggled to formulate her request. He stood beside the desk toying with an ivory paper cutter. The drawer of the desk was open a little and she caught the glint of a metal object in the corner nearest her, a revolver. He followed her eyes and, without seeming to be conscious of any connection between her gaze and his action, casually closed the drawer. A large circular bowl made of dull metal standing upon the table was sending up a thin column of smoke and she was conscious of an irritating little scent in the room. Beside the bowl rested the disk bearing the Bengal tiger seal, still hot, and the ivory jewel box he had been branding.

"What has brought you here so very early in the morning, Carmelita?" he asked.

She moistened her dry lips. There was no

help for it. She must throw herself upon his mercy. "A month ago you told me, Rao, to come to you if I ever needed help. Well, I am desperately in need of help now. I am in tremendous difficulty and you are the only one I can turn to."

His manner seemed to cool a little at this and he looked at her through shrewd eyes. "How can I serve you?" he asked quietly.

"You know that I owe a large sum of money at Canary Cottage—five thousand dollars. Hayden came to me yesterday and threatened to go to my husband if I did not pay him in full. I was desperate. I owe many other bills besides. I took the check for five thousand dollars which you—gave to the Charity Fête and played roulette with it last night at Canary Cottage, hoping to win and square my debts all around. Well—luck was against me. I lost it all. I am worse off than ever. And the other members of the fête committee are at my house now to take away your five thousand dollar check. I agreed to give it to them this morning, and now, you see, I can't. I'm an embezzler! They can arrest me and put me in jail for what I have done!"

"And you want me to replace my former check with another one for a similar amount at once?"

"Yes—yes."

"After the manner in which your husband insulted me Saturday night—should I now make it possible for you to deceive him further about the state of your finances and bring about a reconciliation between you?"

His tones were cold, cruel. But she was too excited to notice.

"Surely you do not hold me responsible for Dudley's actions Saturday night. You know how much I appreciate all your kindnesses to me, and I will do anything if you will only help me out of this frightful mess."

He came closer to her until he was almost touching her and looked at her in a disturbing, calculating manner.

"You will do anything?"

In her desperation she echoed, "Yes—anything."

He studied her critically through eyes that burned.

"Will you come back here and dine alone with me—to-night?"

She took a step away from him and looked up at him frightened and questioning. His request—or invitation—seemed to be pregnant with sinister significance. But she thought of the two women waiting for her at home, the two instruments of cruel fate who would not be denied. She had not grasped his full meaning. And she took the plunge.

She said almost in a whisper, "Yes, I will come—anything."

Without a word he opened the drawer of his desk, took out his check and sat down at the desk to write. As he blotted the paper he looked at her calculatingly. And suddenly as she reached out her hand for the life-saving slip, he seized her in his arms and kissed her hotly upon the lips. For an instant she fought him, then remembering how thoroughly she was at his mercy, yielded with closed eyes. How she hated him at that moment! Reluctantly he let her go.

"Au revoir," he said significantly. But she was gone without a word.

For an instant after her departure Rao-Singh stood in front of his desk fingering the branding disk before him, smiling faintly with the self-satisfied air of a man who has accomplished a task he has been busy upon for a long time and who is just beginning to harvest the fruits of his efforts. Then he pushed the bell upon the desk and Dhinn, his man servant, appeared noiselessly.

"I am having a visitor to-night—a lady," he said to the servant sharply. "I shall want a particularly nice dinner and afterward we must not be disturbed."

CHAPTER XVII

To a young man under thirty the end of the world comes at least once every six months. But he always survives the catastrophe and is ready to take up life with renewed vigor in the new Eden that inevitably follows. Work that absorbs the whole mind is a wonderful aid in weathering such crises of the emotions. Perhaps this is the answer to the question, "Who invented work—and why?"

Dudley Drake softly closed the door leading into the corridor from an elaborate suite of rooms on the fifteenth floor of the Hotel Biltmore, and, briefcase and straw hat in his hand, walked over the soft rug toward the elevator. As he pushed the button and stood waiting for the elevator to appear he looked very cheerful. It was eleven o'clock of the Monday morning following the Saturday night of his dramatic parting with Carmelita at Hedgewood. Momentous events had happened since then for both of them, though each was still ignorant of what the other had past through.

When Dudley left his wife after his dramatic

tirade in which he had allowed to surge forth all his pent-up resentment of the past two months and had virtually given her carte blanche to sue for a divorce if she wished to, he plunged out into the night and down the drive and out into the highway like a blind man in a great hurry, with no idea of his destination. But after all he was a very healthy, normal young man. And the cool night air and his rapid walking soon had their effect in clearing up his mind. He pulled himself together and discovered that he was on his way to the Hedgewood railway station. A few hundred yards more and he began to wonder if he hadn't just made rather a fool of himself.

Airing our grievances against one whom we love brings always an aftermath of remorse in which the object of our erstwhile anger looms up as a snow-white angel and we ourselves are the only one at fault. And we are very apt to do ourselves a greater injustice than we did our loved one.

After all, what he had heard linking the names of his wife and Rao-Singh had been mere gossip and he knew that idle summer porch-rocking women are no worse than smoking-car men when it comes to inventing spicy conversation to fill in the spare moments, and nobody's reputation is ever safe from their

wagging tongues. In his heart he could never conceive of Carmelita's being unfaithful to him. He knew her better than that. He stood stock still in the middle of the road while an owl hooted weirdly deep in the wood that skirted the highway and a chorus of ancient frogs croaked in a deep bass, and debated whether he shouldn't go back and apologize and take her into his arms. But his pride would hardly stand that. The kiss-bidding episode had been something no normal husband could watch with pleasure, especially considering who the lucky bidder had been, no matter how much innocent impulsiveness there had been in Carmelita's actions.

On the whole he would wait until morning before he made advances to her and tried to set himself right. Perhaps he would have some excellent news to tell her when he saw her again. He had an appointment with Chartres at ten in the morning at the Biltmore. Dudley's whole business future, the decision whether his past three months of slaving at the office had been wasted, might be decided by this meeting with Chartres.

Chartres was one of the largest manufacturers in France and he had been in America for three months for the purpose of contracting for several million feet of lumber and several thousand tons of steel for use in recon-

struction work in the devastated regions. Chartres had the job of building anew scores of villages—dwellings, municipal buildings, factories—and he intended buying in America, provided the supply could be found at the right price. Sanford Drake had gotten wind of the coming of the Frenchman and his mission from his Paris agents almost as soon as Chartres decided to come. The Frenchman's trip was to be strictly a confidential affair and the elder Drake had gone to the precaution of summoning Dudley out to his Greenwich home for a week-end to discuss the matter with him.

For Sanford Drake was beginning to look with hopeful approval at the manner in which his nephew was settling down to business and showing some of the acumen that had carried him, Sanford Drake, to his present enviable position in the Street. Drake and Porter were extremely anxious to do business with Chartres. J. P. Morgan and other banking houses had made millions buying steel and other supplies for the Allies during the war. There was no reason why Drake and Porter should not now reap their share of the business of repairing the damage which Morgan-bought shells had wrought in France. Drake and Porter had several large steel and lumber companies for which they transacted foreign business regularly. Indeed Sanford Drake was

financially interested in one or two such concerns and was on their Boards of Directors.

Andre Chartres was a tough nut to crack, there was no doubt about that. He was far from the excitable, emotional Frenchman of fiction the picture of whom the war did much to expel from the minds of the rest of the world. Chartres was small, but so was Ferdinand Foch. He was an iron-haired, pointed-bearded native of Brittany with small keen eyes and a disconcerting habit of waving bunkum aside and getting immediately down to business.

Despite the secrecy surrounding Chartres' coming to America, several other firms besides Drake and Porter had gotten word of his impending visit and were making preparations to receive him with offers. Sanford Drake knew that the competition would be stiff, that there would be better prices offered to the Frenchman than Drake and Porter would be able to make, that the chances of his concern's landing the contracts were not too good. But there was something like $25,000,000 involved and it was worth trying for. He would use it as a means of testing his nephew.

So he summoned Dudley to Greenwich on the week-end Carmelita accepted Lucy's invitation to Hedgewood, told him the situation, and put him in charge of Drake and Porter's

interests as far as Chartres was concerned.

"I don't mind telling you that this is a tough assignment," he told Dudley. "And judging by the muff you made of the deal with that other Frenchman, Duval, I'm an old fool to put you in charge. But you've shown signs of buckling down to business lately and one or two deals you've put over have given me agreeable surprises and I want to give you another chance. You're young and just married—to a very lovely girl, I may say—and you deserve a chance. Here's my proposition: Close with Chartres and the day he signs I'll give you ten per-cent. of the commission coming to us—that will be about $250,000. Something to work for, eh? And sometimes when our young men put over something especially noteworthy like this, we take them into the firm. A word to the wise, you know—"

Dudley was tickled pink at the chance. He had come home to their Greenwich Village apartment with mysterious hints to Carmelita of prosperity just around the corner and plunged into the business of cultivating the elusive Chartres with every resource at his command. Sworn to deep secrecy by his uncle regarding the negotiations, he had not even told Carmelita what was in the wind. He arranged an initial meeting with Chartres at the Hotel Biltmore.

"But you quote me no figures or assurances that you can deliver," the Frenchman had snapped at him. "Details—I must have definite details. Show me where the material is coming from. Guarantee me shipping dates. You are putting the cart before the horse, young man. Take a month to get estimates and production figures from the mills, then come to me again."

So Dudley abandoned practically all his other duties to satisfy the demand of this exacting Frenchman, while Chartres went on to Pittsburgh and Chicago to interview other representatives of American firms anxious to do business with him. Dudley himself made frequent trips to Pittsburgh and Youngstown for steel estimates, to New England and Southern lumber mills. He brought his figures back and worked them out nights at the office and home until he was tearing down ruined French villages and building them up again in his sleep. His uncle kept a wary eye upon him but he did not offer a suggestion one way or the other. Finally Chartres went out to California to be gone a month. There followed four weeks of feverish anxiety on Dudley's part during which he wrote or wired the Frenchman two or three times a week and received not a sign or a word from him.

A week previous Dudley had learned that

Chartres was back in New York and had telephoned the Frenchman for an appointment. The reply was most discouraging. He had practically concluded arrangements with another house, Chartres said, and intended to sign the papers the following Tuesday and sail for France on Thursday. Dudley's hand on the receiver trembled violently. But he refused to be cast aside. He had in his desk all the lumber and steel bids elaborately worked out to the minimum price and maximum detail and he was sure they were as low as it was possible for any one to quote. Would not Monsieur Chartres grant him a few moments, say at ten on Monday morning? At first M. Chartres would not, but finally, remembering that this was the handsome dark young man who had fought in the French Air Service even before America entered the war, he reluctantly consented.

Dudley knocked upon the door of Chartres' suite on the fifteenth floor of the Biltmore precisely at ten and was admitted. The little Napoleon of finance was sitting near the window of his sitting-room before a table upon which a breakfast tray rested. He was alternately munching a piece of toast and drinking wine. A bottle which he had brought from France stood upon the tray and a waiter hovered near. Dudley accepted a chair and

waited until he had finished breakfast and the waiter withdrew.

"As I told you over the telephone," Chartres said cheerfully, "your mission is quite hopeless. However—"

"If you will permit me to present a few figures, as you requested at our first interview," offered Dudley and he took his two months' work from his briefcase, all neatly typed in easily grasped form.

Chartres accepted the sheets of paper with little interest. As he read his small eyes brightened a little. It took him twenty minutes to digest what was before him. Then he consumed another twenty minutes in going over them thoroughly again, while Dudley sat in extreme discomfort, for in addition to the momentous business at hand the room was very stuffy and hot, a condition which the Frenchman did not seem to mind in the slightest.

Having finished his reading, Chartres asked a few sharp questions for five minutes. Then he said, "Did you bring a contract for me to sign, Mr. Drake?"

Dudley, who could have been knocked over with a feather at that moment, produced the contract. "This is a preliminary agreement," he managed to say. "If you will come down to the office, we will have the other papers drawn and ready for you."

Chartres nodded. He signed his name with a flourish. He produced another glass and poured out wine for two.

"To our agreement and prosperity," he toasted gravely. Dudley had never tasted anything half so good. It was the nectar of the gods and Chartres was the greatest financial wizard who had ever lived. And so Dudley Drake, taking his leave after making sure that the signed contract was securely in his briefcase, closed the door of Chartres' suite softly and made his way to the elevator. And no wonder he was looking very cheerful. He had put it over, the deal that was to "make" him—and Carmelita.

"Why, doggone it, I'm going to be rich, I *am* rich," he told himself in some surprise as the elevator whisked him swiftly to the main floor. His uncle had mentioned $250,000 as his share of the commission, and a possible partnership. Carmelita would be so proud of him and she could have anything she wanted now. Poor girl, he'd show her. He descended into the subway on air and didn't mind the stifling heat down there and the fact that he had to stand all the way to Wall Street clinging to a dirty strap. He hadn't telephoned his uncle. He wanted to see Sanford Drake's face as he told him the news.

Sanford Drake was busy with a client.

Some petty matter involving a half million or so, Dudley smiled to himself as he sat at his own desk in the outer office and waited. His news would hold. It was big enough. When he saw his uncle's fat, perspiring visitor come out, he walked in as nonchalantly as he possibly could and, standing before Sanford Drake, said simply, "Chartres has signed."

"No!" ejaculated Drake.

"Here is the contract," and Dudley produced it from his precious briefcase which he had taken the precaution to bring in with him. He pointed to the Frenchman's scrawl.

"Well, well, you put it over. And to tell the truth, Dudley, I didn't think you had a Chinaman's chance. I understood Hodge and Story had him tied fast. Well, I certainly congratulate you from the bottom of my heart." He held out his hand and motioned Dudley to a chair beside his desk. "It's more of a personal triumph for you than it is for the firm, that's sure, and you deserve full credit. I've watched you; you've worked like a dog. But you've made good with a vengeance and I hope the reward will be worth it."

He shot over his shoulder to his secretary who occupied a desk in back of him, "Miss Gorman, bring my checkbook, please." While Dudley wondered what was up, the old man wrote a check for $25,000 in Dudley's favor,

and signed his name to it. Then he turned again to his secretary and said significantly, "You may go to lunch now, Miss Gorman, if you like." Miss Gorman had been with Sanford Drake long enough to know the meaning of that. She put on her hat and left at once. Sanford Drake handed the check to his nephew.

"When we first discussed this deal," he said, "I promised you ten per-cent. of the commissions the firm got out of it and I said your share would amount to about $250,000. There isn't time to figure it out exactly now and I have no authority to pay you in full until the stuff is actually delivered and Chartres pays and we receive our money from the mills. But I want to give you this check in advance because I think perhaps you can use . . . it."

Dudley accepted it gratefully. How he would open Carmelita's eyes! He could hardly wait to get out to her.

Sanford Drake seemed to have something further to say and seemed to be a little doubtful, as to the propriety of saying it. Presently he took a chance. "Dudley," he cleared his throat, "I don't mind saying I didn't care especially for you when you first came to work for me. I quarreled with your father because he exasperated me. He was an impractical dreamer. I wanted to help you out but you

impressed me in those early days as an irresponsible young fellow who would never make good. Especially after that Duval fiasco in Paris. Then you came home and 'phoned me you were married and I thought, 'The poor young fool.'

"But I was the one who was fooled. You got a fresh grip and you've simply amazed me the way you've developed. And now this Chartres contract—it's the biggest thing that has come to Drake and Porter since the war and you've put it over all alone. You're going to be wealthy now, comparatively speaking for a young man of your age, and I know it won't spoil you. And I don't mind telling you that at the next Board of Directors' meeting, which is next Monday, I am going to recommend that you be taken into the firm, and they usually take my word in such things."

He looked at the young man keenly and Dudley wondered what marvelous announcement was coming next. But Sanford Drake took a new, more personal tack. "I don't suppose what I'm going to say now is any of my business. I hate meddlers, as you know. But I'm your only living relative after all, Dudley, and perhaps I'm not such an unromantic old fossil as you think. All this success you've won in business isn't going to do you any good unless you're happy at home. And I've been

observing you and wondering lately. You seemed to have something depressing on your mind, and it wasn't all Chartres either. What is it—domestic difficulties? Don't tell me if you don't want to, but I don't think you have many intimates—I work you too hard—and it's a bad thing for a man to brood too much alone."

Dudley looked at his uncle in some surprise. He had always regarded Sanford Drake as his hard-headed, business-only employer. Never before had the old man indicated in any way that there was any blood relationship between them. But it was quite evident that the elder Drake's interest was kindly intended and probably his advice would be valuable. Dudley forgot his new-gained riches and thought of Carmelita and the manner in which he had last left her. He was thoroughly ashamed of himself.

On an impulse he told his uncle all about the misunderstanding with her and his suspicions and the manner in which they had been virtually separated since her leasing of the Long Island summer home. Dudley did not spare himself in the slightest in this frank recital but he did not mention the name of Rao-Singh. He had an instinctive desire to protect Carmelita, to minimize her own selfishness and possible blame in the whole matter, and to

convey the impression that he was entirely at fault. It was a direct reaction from the feelings he had had when he left her that eventful Saturday night which, though it was only two days away, seemed now to have existed some time in the dark ages. So much had happened in the meantime.

Sanford Drake listened. In the end he said, "It seems to me, Dudley, that you're assuming rather too much of the responsibility for a bad situation, though, heaven knows, you're not blameless. Neither is Carmelita—and neither am I, for that matter. I have encouraged you to forget everything for business, for this Chartres contract. I thought I was doing it for your own sake. I wanted to give you a chance to prove to yourself and me that you are worthy of big things in a business way. I have kept you on practically starvation wages because I thought it was good discipline. But I guess I was wrong. It *was* good discipline, but, like lots of good discipline, it has caused a rebellion in another quarter.

"There never has been a substantial and lasting success won in the business world except by hard work.

"I know lots of young men read that kind of thing in these stories on 'How I Make My Millions' in the magazines and say, 'Bunk!

Most fortunes are made more by good luck than good management.' Well, luck has something to do with making a million, too. But you can force luck. You can make it come to you. By hard work. Generally what looks like luck is just the logical result of keeping everlastingly on the job. When opportunity knocks at your door it's a wise thing to be there instead of up at the Princeton Club shooting billiards. So hard work pays, Dudley, in good money as well as good discipline. Look at this Chartres business. But still I blame myself for not giving you your chance sooner.

"You mustn't forget that your wife is the daughter of a very rich man, one of the most prominent millionaires in South America—he arrived in New York the other day by the way—and it was a terrific come down for her to be forced to live on a broker's clerk's wages. Your living quarters you must admit are—er—rather cramped and the very thought of spending some of these recent broiling days there is enough to make anybody swelter. She is young and beautiful, used all her life to extravagant clothes and entertainment. You couldn't exactly blame her for rushing to her rich friends when she got the chance and taking up her life with them when she unexpectedly got the money. Could you?

"I'm a bachelor myself but my observation has been that the successful marriage is based upon compromise, a give and take proposition. Each partner makes concessions for the other's character and whims—and past. If I were you I would call it a day at this minute here at the office and go out and send her the biggest flock of flowers I could find and then hustle up to the Pennsylvania Station and catch the first train to Hedgewood. Tell her all about the Chartres business and your big success and that your worries are over. And show her the check! Money talks to the ladies, Dudley, even when they're in love with you."

Dudley had never thought his uncle's cold gray eyes were capable of the almost affectionate warmth he now saw in them. Why, Sanford Drake was actually embarrassed. "You're the only living relative I have, Dudley," he was saying. "I'll admit you've touched me in a weak spot by making good in business the way you have and probably if you'd turned out to be a dub I'd have disowned you. But I'm very fond of you, my boy—and it's your own personality as well as this Chartres business that has done the trick. If you ever get into trouble or need help, call on me, will you? Eh? That's good."

By this time Sanford Drake was fumbling with papers, clearing his throat with thunder-

ous noises, trying to conceal the fact that he had a heart, and making a great fuss of getting back on a businesslike basis.

This was by far the longest speech Dudley had ever heard his usually laconic uncle make to anybody. Having made it, the financier, greatly perturbed at his own garrulity, turned abruptly back to the papers on his desk without paying any further attention to his nephew. Dudley stood uncertainly for a moment, then said, "Thank you for your interest, Uncle Sanford. I think you have the right idea. And I'll be on my way immediately."

"Telephone Chartres that the final papers will be ready for him in the morning. You might take them up to the Biltmore yourself," said Sanford Drake without looking up. "And good luck."

There was a florist around the corner on Exchange Place and, after ringing Chartres, Dudley hurried directly there. He ordered a huge bouquet of red and white roses and lilies of the valley to be telegraphed out to Hedgewood and promised all sorts of disaster to the fussy little Italian proprietor if he did not see that they reached their destination that afternoon.

At his bank Dudley had to stand in line for ten precious minutes. Moreover, owing to the size of the new account he wanted to open, he

had to see the treasurer as well as the receiving teller. But twenty minutes after he had entered he hustled out with a new bank-book and check-book in his inside pocket, and the name on each was "Carmelita Drake."

He put his stomach in jeopardy by bolting down a three o'clock lunch at a soda fountain, boarded a subway uptown express, and caught the four o'clock local on the Long Island Railroad for Hedgewood.

The railroad journey seemed interminable. There was a long wait in the tunnel under New York and when the train reached the comparatively open stretches of Queens, with its scattered new factories and apartment house developments, and penetrated further into the more fragrant air and more natural scenery of rural Long Island, it appeared to be stopping every hundred yards or so to discharge armies of passengers and acres of trunks. There is, of course, nothing more local in the world than a local on the Long Island Railroad.

But at last, after traveling the distance in an hour and three-quarters which the express train did in an hour, the conveyance wheezed into the Hedgewood stations, one of the few pretty, new and clean stations along the line, and Dudley swung off upon the platform be-

fore the train stopped. He hailed a taxi and in fifteen minutes stood with anxious anticipation in the doorway of the living-room of Carmelita's house.

CHAPTER XVIII

Carmelita had turned Rao-Singh's check over to Mrs. Peabody and Mrs. Hurd, who were far too rapt up in their mission to notice and would have been too reserved anyway to comment upon their hostess' hasty arrival and agitated condition. Carmelita managed a smile and listened politely to their inconsequential comments about the Fête and its success.

"You and Prince Rao-Singh deserve a large share of the credit," declared Mrs. Peabody, and Carmelita winced at this coupling of their names.

"And Mr. Church tells me that Mr. Drake, your husband, was of great value in the accounting," chimed Mrs. Hurd. Poor Dudley!

Carmelita offered them tea and was glad when they refused, though they lingered on several endless minutes. Under ordinary circumstances she would have been flattered by their evident desire to cultivate her and their pleasure in her company. But in her present state of mind she was fervently grateful when they picked up their wraps and sauntered,

chatting as they went, to Mrs. Peabody's car. She stood down in the drive talking through the open limousine window until they started.

"You really must come over, dear Mrs. Drake, for some bridge," invited Mrs. Peabody at the last minute. "And bring Mr. Drake. We shall be delighted."

Carmelita accepted without hardly knowing what she did. What a farce. Well, no date had been set, anyway.

She had hardly regained the living-room and a deep, upholstered chair in which to rest and gather her scattered wits together when another car drove up bearing Lucy Hodge in an excited, for her, condition.

"Jackie phones me that your father is in town, Carmelita," she greeted her.

Two weeks ago this would have filled Carmelita with a great hope and joy. But since that letter from him—

"That *is* news," she said uncertainly. "I have never heard from him since my marriage, you know—except for a letter I received the other day in which he repeated that he had disowned me. I don't think he'll want to see me."

"Probably not," agreed Lucy, and drew one of her interminable supply of monogrammed cigarettes and, lighting it, exhaled an enormous puff. Her chief interest in dashing over to

give Carmelita the news had been curiosity to see how she would take it. She had, of course, known of the estrangement between Don Caesar de Cordoba and his daughter. "However, I've instructed Jackie to sound him out and possibly something can be done. Frankly, Carmelita, you must be rather up against it for funds, if you'll pardon the impertinence of an old friend. But so are we. I fear sometimes old Jackie will have to turn workingman. That would be a frightful blow. The old dear is so stupid. He would never get along. We should starve."

At eight o'clock, Carmelita was reflecting, she had promised to dine—alone—with Rao-Singh. The significance of the "alone" had dawned upon her when he had seized her in his arms and crushed her to him. He had bought the right to kiss her for five thousand dollars and now with an additional five thousand he—

Her promise had been made in desperation. Surely he would not expect her to keep it. His burning eyes, flushed face, crushing arms that longed to possess her—no, no, there must be a way out!

"What is worrying you, Carmelita? Is something terribly wrong?" asked Lucy, a little alarmed by the wanness of Carmelita's face and the manner in which she was twisting

her fingers until the knuckles showed white.

"Your news is such a shock," Carmelita muttered.

"Well, there is only one way to appease your father, of course. Go to him and offer to divorce Dudley and start all over again. I don't think you two are the lovey-doves you were at the beginning, anyway. You have hardly seen anything of him all summer."

"It has been my fault. He has worked so hard."

"Nonsense. If he had wanted to see more of you he could have managed. And what has all his alleged hard work gotten him—and you—anyway? I don't observe either of you rolling in wealth. You are apparently worrying yourself sick over something—probably money. If you had only taken my advice in the first place, in Paris—

"Please, please!" Carmelita suddenly cried, rising and standing with twisted face before the airily impudent Lucy. And, feeling that she could not stand it a second longer, Carmelita turned swiftly and without a word of explanation rushed up the stairs and to her boudoir. Lucy had risen also and for a minute she stood in curious puzzlement watching Carmelita disappear. Should she follow? Possibly Carmelita was ill. But she had a date to go swimming with Rao-Singh and a party

in ten minutes and, with a sigh and a shrug of the shoulders, she walked out and started her car.

Carmelita listened to the screeching and gratings as Lucy shifted her gears badly, and felt better. At least she had been successful in not breaking down in her visitor's presence. She had learned in the past few months that Lucy Hodge was an entertaining fair-weather friend but a bad confidante in an emergency. Lucy's mind only seemed to work when she was scheming something for her own interests. Otherwise it was shallow and lazy. There was no use confiding in her.

So her father was in New York. An hour away, and he could do so much for her if he only would. Why, it would be nothing for him to write her a check for five thousand dollars, if he could bury his pride enough to do it and if he wouldn't ask questions, and she could give it to Rao-Singh and have done with him forever.

On an impulse she took the telephone and called the Ritz-Carlton Hotel—Lucy had not mentioned where he was stopping but he always went there. There was a little confusion in getting the connection and Carmelita tapped her foot impatiently. "Hello," said the man at the desk, and she inquired eagerly if Don Caesar de Cordoba were registered.

"Yes," came the answer. Her heart missed a beat. Might she speak to him? Silence a moment. Then, "Mr. de Cordoba is out of town and will not return for two weeks." Carmelita hung up the transmitter utterly depressed. She had really managed to work up considerable hope from her father's presence so near, and now it was shattered. And he had not tried to get in touch with her before leaving.

She looked around to find the maid standing in her boudoir door with a large, fragrant bouquet of flowers. Who could be sending them? Rao-Singh? The maid approached with them and Carmelita could not restrain an exclamation, "Oh, aren't they beautiful!" Dudley's Italian florist had fairly outdone himself. She pressed her burning cheeks into their cool, sweet depths. There was a card buried in the mass of red roses:

Good news and I
are coming.
DUDLEY.

Dudley! And he was coming here. "You may take them, Marie," she said to the maid calmly, "and put them in water. There are vases in the hall closet. And be very careful with them." She handed over the flowers and the maid disappeared.

The flowers were a good omen. He had probably been thinking about Saturday night and was coming to make amends. That was what he meant by "good news." Well, it *was* good news and she would welcome him with open arms. But he brought complications also. On the whole, she concluded to take the plunge. She would, she decided at last, sitting uneasily in a chair near the window, tell him everything and throw herself upon his mercy. And now, in preparation for the ordeal, she would change into fresh clothes for the evening. It was nearly half-past five.

She went to her wardrobe and selected a simple, sleeveless evening gown of a silky burnt-orange material and laid it out upon the bed. Then she disrobed, bathed, foregoing the assistance of her maid, and donned the fresh costume. Physically the renovation made her feel considerably better. She was sitting on the little bench in front of the mirror in her elaborate dressing table administering the final touches to her toilette when she caught sight of Dudley's face behind her in the glass. He startled her, for she had not heard his taxi arriving. He was agrin from ear to ear. She rose with a joyous expression and in two strides he had her in his arms and was kissing her hands and face and shoulders very thor-

oughly, and he wondered if she were going to cry.

Finally he held her off from him and fairly shouted in his eagerness, "Darling, I have the most wonderful news in the world. All our problems are solved!"

Poor boy. His knowledge of their problems was so limited.

"You don't believe it? Well, look at this," and he pulled out two thin leather-bound volumes—the bank-book and the check-book. He was excited as a youngster. "They're yours, Carmelita. See—your name is on the bank-book."

"But I don't understand." It was indeed her name on the book and, opening the pages, she saw that there was $25,000 deposited to her credit. And the check-book was crisp and new. Was this a cruel joke?

She had sunk down upon the bed because she no longer trusted her knees, and he sat down beside her.

"It's my pay for the big deal I've put over for my uncle—the one I've been so mysterious about. The papers were signed to-day, and this is just an installment of my commission. Don't be afraid to take it. There's lots more coming. We're rich, Carmelita, rich—you can buy anything you like! Rent a whole village of Long Island estates if you want them! Our

troubles are over, as I said. And my uncle is going to take me into the firm." He poured it out in a joyful, tumultuous flood into her unbelieving ears that were finally forced to believe.

Suddenly she burst into tears, to his astonishment, half laughing, almost hysterical. He tried helplessly to understand and comfort her.

"This is a fine way to take my news," he protested. She clung close to him, apologizing brokenly, "I am crying because I am so happy —happy."

Poor boy, this was what he had been working for all these months. And she had put every impediment in his way. He had gone right on slaving for her. And unconsciously he *had* solved all their problems. Why, he had opened a way out as broad and clear as sunlight. She would write a check from her own check-book for five thousand dollars and dash over with it to Rao-Singh and the world would all seem bright again.

Dudley was going right on making plans without noticing she wasn't listening. "I want you to let me pay everything it has cost you to lease this place and run it," he said earnestly. "And then we'll start on a new basis. After Labor Day we'll move into a new apartment on the Drive and we'll start an entirely new

mode of life—entertaining, see all the shows, oh, we'll have a wonderful time this fall and winter, Carmelita! Don't think I haven't appreciated what you've gone through with me. I love you all the more for it."

"And I've never loved you so much as at this minute, Dudley," she caressed him. He had evidently forgotten all about Rao-Singh. If he would only let her get away and transact her business quickly with the Hindu and clear her conscience once and for all.

"If you've got any debts here in connection with the house," he went on rather grandly, "I want you to go right ahead and pay them out of your check-book. The money is yours and you don't have to account to me for it in any way." It was such a delicious sensation to be able to say things like that to her at last that he could have gone on saying them forever.

"Don't you want to change your clothes, Dudley? It's been so fearfully hot and, poor boy, you've hurried so to get out here and tell me your wonderful news." While he was busy doing it, she could, she thought—

"What I'd like to do," he answered, "is to take a little dip in the Sound. It's rather late in the day for that, I know, but I know I'd feel right on the crest after a couple of dives. Don't suppose you'll come along. I see you're

dressed for dinner." He looked at her anxiously. "I hope you haven't made a dinner engagement anywhere. I want you all to myself to-night, and we can have a quiet little honeymoon dinner together."

"I'm afraid I *did* say I'd dine—with Lucy," she said confusedly. Perhaps she could get an opportunity to get away for a few minutes that way. "But I can dash over and call it off."

"Why not do it over the 'phone?" There seemed no answer to that.

She waited for him down in the living-room, not daring to absent herself yet, and tried to read the evening newspaper he had brought out with him and dropped on the divan. She was tickled to death with his wonderful news, not now so much for what it would mean to her in the future but really because he had made good and been rewarded for his months of strenuous work. And, of course, it could hardly have come at a more opportune time. The hand of fate seemed to be operating in her favor at last.

He came down in his bathing suit and once more she felt a glow of pride in his well-set-up body and broad shoulders and altogether wholesome appearance. Dudley had been a rather famous college athlete in his day and he had always taken good care of himself.

Moreover, his was the sort of physique that never showed the results of the hardships it was put under. He had been under a severe physical and mental strain for a year now, yet his face and eyes were as clear and free of wrinkles as a baby's. There was no man quite like Dudley. She tossed her paper into the corner of the divan, sprang up and flung herself into his arms and kissed him anew.

"Well, sweetheart—that's something like," he laughed as he released her. She kept hold of his hand as they walked down the path together leading to the little pier. It was near the end of the lazy August afternoon. The Sound was like glass and the water at high tide lapped against the pier with a little plopping sound. A tramp steamer was making slowly for New York along the horizon. Closer by a slim yacht had lowered its sails for lack of wind and was making noisy use of the auxiliary motor. She sat on the bench at the end of the pier and watched him walk out upon the springboard and, balancing himself an instant on his toes, launch into a graceful dive. He came up damp and smiling.

"That clears the cobwebs away!" he called to her as he hoisted himself up the ladder and onto the pier. "Let's buy a place like this. We can come into New York and live at a hotel

during the winter months." He seemed to believe he was a rival of Rockefeller now. She smiled acquiescence. And all the time a vague uneasiness was spoiling her delight in his triumph. If she could only go to Rao-Singh and get this thing forever off her mind without causing Dudley to ask questions. He took three more dives, thoroughly enjoying himself, and then he took her silence and seeming impatience as a desire to get back to the house, so he announced, "Well, I guess that'll do. Will you roll out early in the morning, Carmelita, and swim with me before I get the train for New York?" She agreed.

It was half-past seven by the clock in the living-room when she walked into the house. Dudley had obediently gone around to enter by the back door so as not to track water over the rugs. He was standing at the foot of the stairs when the telephone rang and she picked it up to answer. At the sound of the voice on the wire she turned pale and looked quickly around to see where he was. Rao-Singh was calling her.

"I hope you have not forgotten our engagement," said the suave voice.

She answered hurriedly, "Tell Lucy not to worry. I shall be right along. I'm sorry she is ill." And hung up the receiver. "It was Lucy Hodge's maid. She is suddenly ill

and wants me to run over for a minute. You don't mind?"

"Oh, hang Lucy," he said impatiently. "Just when I wanted you all to myself."

"I'll only be a minute."

"If you'll wait five minutes, I'll go over with you." He was anxious to be with her as much as possible.

"No, you go ahead and get dressed and I'll be back before you're ready to come down to dinner." The maid was already setting the table for two in the next room. "It will only make it harder to get away if you're with me. I can tell her I must get back to you."

She went over to him and kissed him and he reluctantly yielded. As soon as he had disappeared up the steps she went over to the wall-safe in the living-room. She had taken the precaution to place her new bank-book and check-book there while she accompanied Dudley swimming. She twirled the combination, pulled open the door, and fumbled hastily in the drawer of the inner compartment for the books. She heard something fall as she secured them and turned away, giving the safe-door a push to close it but not making sure it had locked. She was too intent upon getting away before Dudley summoned her for some reason or other to investigate what had fallen down inside the safe.

She snapped on her desk light and made out a check to "Cash" for five thousand dollars. Her fountain pen trembled as she wrote, so much so that she made a bad blot on the check and had to tear it up and toss it into the little wicker waste basket at her feet. She took the precaution to tear it into very small bits. Then she made out another check, this time more carefully, and stuffed it into the bosom of her dress. With a precautionary look around, she hurried out through the open door, out upon the piazza and over the lawn, not stopping to don hat or wrap beforehand.

CHAPTER XIX

Prince Rao-Singh was looking forward with tense expectancy to Carmelita's coming. When it came to be after seven o'clock and he had heard no word of her, he had telephoned. Her answer to his question, while a little puzzling, was reassuring. Probably there had been a servant near at the time, and her seemingly irrelevant answer about Lucy's illness was thus explained. It did not occur to him that Carmelita's husband might be in Hedgewood. Her answer had certainly meant that she was coming to him. He had feared for a time that she would go back on her bargain but now he was sure his fears had been groundless. Perhaps she even cared for him a little.

He had believed, long ago, it seemed, in Paris that he could make her love him. His wealth and social position must appeal to her, he reasoned at the time. She was used to every luxury, was the daughter of a millionaire, and was going back to South America to marry a man whom she did not love and who was not as rich, from all reports, as he. Why should she not accept him, Prince Rao-Singh,

as a substitute? He had money, he was rather handsome and distinguished, at least other women had been eager to tell him so, and he had an authentic title, something most foreign ladies in Paris rated quite highly.

But then she had married this Drake, a pauper, a nobody. A mere girlish whim, he had always believed. Drake had happened to be with her at a time her spirits were at a low ebb at the thought of going back to marry an ancient husband. She had been carried away by a sweep of emotions to do a foolish thing. Dudley had just been fortunate in being present to bring off the prize, that was all. He himself could have achieved the same result had he been there at the Garde du Nord alone with her, Rao-Singh was sure. Moreover, he was certain she had repented of her bargain long since. She had rebuked Dudley for the scene he made at the Fête when he, Rao-Singh, had kissed her and she had not seemed to mind his impetuous and hardly impersonal action very much. She had been leading a life out here on Long Island that her husband obviously didn't approve, flaunting Dudley at every turn. And she did not dare tell her husband of her present disastrous financial situation, and Dudley could not help her if she did.

Rao-Singh had consciously, and Lucy Hodge

had because it was her nature and philosophy, carried on a campaign all summer to make Carmelita dissatisfied with her marriage. Now it appeared that the campaign was about to bear fruit. He had not the slightest compunction in driving the bargain with Carmelita that was bringing her to this clandestine dinner with him. Ever since he had met her he had wanted her, and he meant to have her, fair means or foul. He had simply taken advantage of a situation that played right into his hands. She needed five thousand dollars desperately, but no more desperately than he desired her. She had made the bargain with open eyes, if tearful ones, and she knew what to expect.

The vain man of Rao-Singh's type likes to believe that a woman's sole motive in obeying his wishes is love. It is soothing to the vanity. And so Rao-Singh, though he was aware of the dire necessity that had impelled Carmelita to make a rash promise she did not understand fully, was seeking to persuade himself that she was really coming to him because she loved him.

Rao-Singh had spared no pains to make the dinner an attractive one. He stood in the doorway leading from his study, which was located in a little wing of the house apart from the rest, into the dining-room and surveyed the

scene with the satisfaction of an epicure. His major-domo, Dhinn, was putting the finishing touches upon the small table with its glistening white linen and shining silver. Fresh flowers gave off their fragrance from the center of the table and a candle in an odd Oriental holder and shade gave a soft, mellow light at each end. The rest of the room was dark. Rao-Singh had brought several trunkfuls of his native household decorations with him to America, and he had sought to reproduce as nearly as possible in his Long Island home the atmosphere of India. He succeeded very well. Soft Oriental rugs covered the floors. From the shadowy walls gleamed dully a bronze Buddha, the ivory tusks of an elephant, rare tapestries. It was a room to delight the eye of a collector but hardly a room to reassure the heart of a married woman who has come to dine secretly with its owner.

Rao-Singh was attired in evening clothes and save for the white turban which he wore around his head and his beady black eyes, he might have been taken for an unusually large American society man of thirty-five whose skin has been burned swarthy by the summer sun. He had made a trip to New York a few days previous for the express purpose of purchasing a gorgeous diamond pendant for an outrageous price from one of the exclusive

Fifth Avenue shops, having heard through his agents that the jewel had just arrived in this country. He was a collector of rarities like that. The pendant lay in its case on the study table. There was a feminine rarity upon whom he planned to bestow it as a present. For Rao-Singh was a collector of beautiful women also.

"You understand my instructions perfectly," he said in a sharp, low voice in Indian dialect to the servant at the table. "When the lady arrives, we are not to be disturbed under any circumstances. You will serve the dinner yourself, and the other servants will remain out of the room entirely."

Dhinn bowed and, satisfied, Rao-Singh went back to his study. In a box with an intricately carved cover the diamond pendant rested upon the big flat-topped desk in the middle of the room. This room was Rao-Singh's private sanctum. It fairly breathed of India. There was only one door, leading to the dining-room, and the only other possible exit was through the long, narrow curtained French windows from which it would be a slight drop to the lawn outside. Rao-Singh kept these closed at all times, and the curtains, despite the fact that it was summer, were of heavy fabric.

Rao-Singh sat down in front of the desk and drew toward him a circular metal container

which he always kept there. From the drawer of the desk he procured a wooden box containing a green powder. Carefully tapping one of the powders into the bowl, he next picked up the tiger's head seal, which both Carmelita and Dudley had noticed and wondered about at different times. Applying a match to the powder in the bowl, he waited until it had flared up and then settled to a steady flame before he thrust the seal into it. He waited until the seal was red hot and then pressed it down tightly upon the jewel box. There was the pungent smell of burning wood. When Rao-Singh lifted the seal, the box bore, like his other possessions, the mark of the snarling Bengal tiger, his personal crest.

Hardly had he completed this task when Dhinn appeared noiselessly on the threshold of the study, for it was a region he had been forbidden ever to invade, and announced that the lady had arrived.

Rao-Singh rose and walked from the study, closing the door carefully after him, through the dining-room and into the living-room where Carmelita stood nervously very near the outer door as if anxious to get her business over and be gone, as indeed she was. He wondered why she had worn no wrap or hat, just the light evening gown that exposed her shoulders and neck and a segment of her white

bosom without protection to the cool night air.

"Ah, you have arrived," he observed, taking her hand and kissing it ceremoniously. "I had begun to fear that you had forgotten our engagement."

"No, I have not forgotten," she said hurriedly. "But—" She was fumbling in the bosom of her dress and drew out the crumpled check. "I find unexpectedly that I am able to pay you what I owe you at once. I have brought a check." She tried to hand it to him but he pretended not to understand. "I appreciate your kindness in lending the money to me very much, Rao. I shall always be grateful to you and I am glad I am able to pay you back so quickly. Won't you take it and let me say good-night? I am sorry I cannot have dinner with you. But—my husband has come—and I must go back to him at once. Please understand." She was becoming rather frightened at the cold, uncomprehending manner he was looking at her.

Still making no move to accept the money, he said calmly, "I think I might understand better if you would come into my study and explain to me there. There is danger of interruption here."

She tried at once to protest. But he insisted, and she thought it was better and quicker to let him have his own way. Besides,

he was right; since he would not take her check and let her go at once, it was better to discuss the matter in greater privacy. It did not occur to her that she was in any danger.

He stood aside at the study door and allowed her to enter. Then he followed and, pausing at the door, shut it, turned the key in the lock, and deliberately dropped the key into his pocket. Standing near the desk she suffered a shock of surprise at this action and stared at him wide-eyed. It looked like a trap, and she had walked into it as innocently as a baby.

He faced her, a cruel look in his narrow, beady eyes, and his voice was scornful. "I don't want your money. I made a bargain with you, you remember. You were to come here and dine with me alone. 'I will do anything if you will lend me five thousand dollars,' you said. I lent it to you. I kept my part of the bargain. Now I expect you to keep yours."

She retreated quickly until the length of the desk was between them. She was thoroughly frightened now, looking around a little wildly for a means of exit. The French windows seemed to be locked also. "I—don't—understand," she said breathlessly.

"There is a certain type of woman, usually very beautiful, seductive, and young, who believes in picking the choicest treasures out of

life's shop window and never paying. She drinks the froth of the cup and always leaves the dregs. She plays with fire but she believes, like the salamander, that she will not be burned. Men are her natural prey. She takes everything from them—their hearts, their money—but she gives nothing in return.

"You are a woman of the world, Carmelita, and I think you *do* understand why I invited you here. I am not in the habit of lending five thousand dollar sums without security and getting nothing whatever in return." All the time he was approaching more closely to her. It would do no good to cry out, Carmelita decided. No one would hear but his servants and he ruled them like a czar. What a wretched turn things had taken.

"But you are a gentleman, Rao, and—"

"Don't talk like a fool, my innocent one. Is this the way a married woman makes excuses to the man to whom she has stolen away from home for a secret rendezvous, not even taking time to put on her hat or cloak? What is the use of pretending? You made your bargain voluntarily and you have come here of your own free will. You could have stayed away. Should you have done so, I would have made you pay—some time, but you could have escaped coming to-night if you wished to. But

you didn't. You came. You must know why I asked you, Carmelita, why—"

"No. No. I came because I wished to repay the loan with this check. Please, please take it—and let me go."

He deliberately folded his hands behind his back and looked at her with steely eyes that chilled her heart.

Then he dropped entirely the mask that had concealed his true feelings toward her for so many months. She was the one woman in the world he desired—a quivering creature of intoxicating loveliness helpless here before him. His cheeks were flushed, his dark eyes shining. Suddenly he had come to her with two strides and had taken her fiercely in his cruel arms and was crushing her to him. With all her strength she could not force him away.

"Carmelita, I have always loved you—you must know it," he breathed, his mouth very close to hers. "From those first days in Paris I have desired you more than anything else in the world. It has been torture to be near you. I have suffered long enough."

He showered his kisses upon her face and neck as she struggled with the frenzy of a tigress. Her eyes were wide with terror. Her senses whirled, a dizzy, fainting sensation assailed her. Desperation lent her strength. She clutched wildly for support and one hand

grasped the drawer of his desk and yanked it half open before he could pinion her wrist. The effort brought him crashing against the heavy chair in front of the desk. He tripped and lost his balance for an instant, loosing his grip upon her to seize the edge of the desk to prevent himself from falling.

Carmelita bounded to the other side of the desk, gasping for breath. Her wide eyes swept the room for any means of defense against him. Suddenly in the half-open drawer of the desk she caught sight of his revolver.

With a quick movement the revolver was in her hand. It was a long, heavy European style of weapon and she had to hold it in both hands.

The left sleeve of her gown had been torn entirely away in the struggle. Her shoulder and a portion of her back were bare.

"Let me go, Rao," she cried hysterically. "Don't come near me again—open the door." She was beside herself with fear and anger. At the moment she was capable of anything that would rescue her from him.

He was not afraid. He laughed at her. "You are insane. Put the gun down before you hurt yourself."

He was coming upon her again. She saw him coming as if through a haze and she was

powerless. The gun lowered in her hand as his passion-torn face came closer to her, but she kept her grip upon it. Heedless of his danger, he took her, too exhausted longer to resist, in his mad embrace. He clutched between them for the gun. But he was an instant too late. A muffled shot sounded. He recoiled from her, staggering, his hand at his side.

For a second neither seemed to comprehend what had happened. Then blood began to stain his white vest under his hand. He looked at the stained hand and then at her, and the expression upon his paling face turned to fiendish hate. With a bound toward her he seized her wrist in a vice-like grip while he applied a match to the powder in the metal container on the desk. The flames shot up and with his free hand he held in the midst of them the seal of the Bengal tiger, hurling weird Indian maledictions upon her as he did so. When the seal was red-hot, she came out of her half swooning state to realize incredibly his awful purpose. The mask was gone. He was wholly the hate-maddened Oriental!

Carmelita was too late. With a last display of his failing strength, he twisted her wrist violently until the upper part of her body was flung across the flat-topped desk. In a flash he had ripped her torn gown nearly to

her hip and, even as her piercing scream rang out, brought the red-hot seal down upon her back just under the shoulder blade.

"YOU CHEAT!"

It was a horrible, inhuman voice of triumph.

They were the last words his ebbing strength permitted him to speak. The sickening smell of scorched human flesh filled the close air of the room. Still gripping her, his face pale as death, he managed to reach the bell on his table that summoned his servant and pressed it. It was his last effort, for his knees suddenly crashed under and he fell to the floor, dragging Carmelita with him.

For an instant she lay there utterly crushed, unable to move. But slowly her numbed brain fought back and she took in the situation. She raised herself upon one knee and fumbled hurriedly in Rao-Singh's pockets looking for a key. She did not find the door key but she discovered a small one that she judged correctly opened the French windows. Whether he was dead or alive she could not bring herself to look at his face to see. She thought only of getting away, of shutting this horrible memory out of her life forever. Dragging herself to the window, she fumbled madly with the key until she had opened it and without a look behind her staggered through and out into the night.

CHAPTER XX

When Dudley Drake stepped out of his bathing suit in his bedroom and rubbed himself to a healthy pink, he started dressing leisurely and meticulously because he regarded this evening as the beginning of a sort of second honeymoon and he wanted to look accordingly. The day had faded into twilight when he came down to the living-room, whistling as he came, and he snapped on the light, a little disappointed because Carmelita had not returned from Lucy's and was not there to greet him. He pulled out his pipe and tobacco pouch and was applying the match when he noticed that the wall safe stood half open.

He walked over, his eye half upon the firing pipe bowl, unwilling to believe that some outsider had been tampering with the safe. He saw quickly what was holding the door in a peculiar half-open position. A pearl necklace was caught in the hinges and hanging half out. Somebody had yanked the inner drawer inside the safe open with careless haste, spilled the jewels out of their case, and neglected to replace them. Was it Carmelita? This was

certainly her necklace, the one she had told him Lucy Hodge gave her for her birthday. And it came from that peculiarly shaped teakwood box. He picked up the box, intending to replace the necklace, when the Bengal tiger seal of Rao-Singh on the back of the box fairly hit him between the eyes. He stared and uttered an incredulous expression of surprise. What was that doing here? Had he merely presented her with the case? Or was the necklace too—

"Hello, Dudley, I didn't know you were in these parts."

He wheeled around to his second surprise. Lucy Hodge, attired in a stunning peach-colored evening gown and wrap and looking in the best of health, was standing in the doorway.

"We are on our way to the Brandons for bridge. I thought I would drop in and try and persuade Carmelita to come along—you too if you like."

"I don't understand. I thought Carmelita went over to your house, that you were ill."

"Whatever put that into your head, old boy? I am never ill."

"But you telephoned Carmelita that you were."

"Some one has been spoofing you, Dudley. Perhaps some of our practical jokers who

think Carmelita should go out more instead of worrying around the house as she has been doing lately. At any rate I'll run along. Possibly I shall run into her."

Dudley, who had been standing with his broad back to the safe to conceal from Lucy that anything was amiss and thus forestall her curious questions, turned and lifted up the necklace again and started to replace it mechanically in the box. He was puzzled. He closed the safe door and twirled the combination, puffing thoughtful clouds of smoke from his pipe.

Then a light dawned upon him. The necklace, the mysterious telephone call which, he now recalled, had seemed to agitate Carmelita strangely—Rao-Singh! Damn him, he was at the bottom of this.

We instinctively connect our enemies with unpleasant mysteries which confront us. The Reds are at the bottom of the mysterious Wall Street explosion, according to the Department of Justice; the Democrats are responsible for everything from unemployment to the South Dakota drought, according to the Republicans. Dudley jammed his pipe into an ash-bowl and started out of the door with quick strides. A strange fear that something was wrong clutched at his heart as he walked over the damp grass in the moonlight, leaped a hedge

or two, and at length approached Rao-Singh's house. The study in the wing of the place where he had been banished the night of the Fête, was ablaze with light. He stopped behind a tree to reconnoiter a bit and as he did so the main door of the house was flung open and a turbaned servant rushed out and made for the study wing.

At the same time one of the French windows in the study swung violently open. A woman was climbing out in mad haste. In the stream of light that the opened window permitted to egress, he recognized her. Carmelita! She was running now in the direction he had come, but about twenty yards away. He had taken a few strides in her direction and was just about to call to her when he looked back to see the face of Rao-Singh, strangely distorted with pain, show at the opened window. The face suddenly disappeared downward and backward as if Rao-Singh, no longer able to support himself, had fallen.

Dudley hesitated no longer. Before the servant from the front of the house could reach the study, he was at the French window and had lifted himself lightly up and bounded in. He had been prepared by the strange occurrences outside for something wrong, but the sight that met his eye confirmed his worst fears. Rao-Singh lay at full length on the

floor, eyes nearly closed, bleeding from a gash in the back of his head where he had struck the desk in his last fall and from a wound in his side which Dudley saw had been made by a bullet at very close range. He stared unbelievedly. But it must be true. Carmelita had shot the Hindu! Whether she had come here for that deliberate purpose, whether she had done it in self-defense, or whether the whole thing was an accident he had not the time nor evidence to discover. The main thing was to protect her at any cost.

He sensed the presence of other people near and looked up to find three Hindu servants staring in at the window. Dhinn, having at last located another key, now swung open the door leading from the study into the living-room. Dudley steadied his nerves with an effort and picked up the revolver from the floor.

"Send for a doctor at once," he said sharply to Dhinn, running his hand over the wounded man's body and ascertaining that his heart was beating faintly. Dhinn disappeared and did more than he was ordered. He telephoned for a doctor and then for the police. There was a box-like roadside station where a motorcycle policeman was on duty down the main highway about half a mile.

Dudley, recovering from the first shock, was pulling himself together rapidly, which was

A Paramount Picture. *The Cheat.*

"NOW, SHOW *THIS* TO YOUR HUSBAND . . ."

more than could be said for the usually impassive Dhinn, who was now excited enough to be useless. The other servants hovered around volubly, pausing in their chatter only to scowl at Dudley. It was pretty well established with them already that he was the slayer. Dhinn was the only one who spoke English.

"Help me get him into his bed," Dudley ordered him, and he lifted Rao-Singh's limp head while Dhinn, a small man, tugged at his feet. "Here you, lend a hand," Dudley snapped to the others, who had now come through the windows to the scene of the tragedy. They stared stupidly, not comprehending his meaning. "Tell one of them to help you," he turned to Dhinn. The others seemed to be afraid to touch their master, whom they thought to be already dead. But Dhinn requisitioned one of them roughly by the shoulder, and it took all three using all their strength to carry the helpless Rao-Singh up to the stairs and to his ornate bedroom.

If Dudley wondered what was going to happen next in this strange out-of-place Oriental mansion, with its air of mystery and tragedy, he had not long to wait. The doctor and a dusty motorcycle policeman appeared simultaneously at the head of the stairs. The policeman had already paid a preliminary visit to the study and had in his hand Rao-Singh's

revolver. He was a ruddy Irishman with a booming voice and seemed to regard the shooting as a pleasant diversion during an otherwise dull evening.

"Well, well," he greeted Dudley, who seemed to be the only conscious, sensible person in the house, "a little shooting-match? Is the dark lad dead?"

"No. I don't think he's fatally hit. The wound is too low." The doctor, who had bared the Hindu's body in the region of the wound, finished his rapid examination. "I wouldn't be too sure," he broke in cheerfully. "It has missed the heart but it's in a vital spot. He is in a very grave condition."

Dhinn, despatched by the doctor, appeared with a tall glass of whiskey and the physician forced it down Rao-Singh's throat, then, taking the material from his medicine kit, began cauterizing the wound.

Officer Joseph Delaney was all attention. The majesty of the law demanded that he find the Hindu's assailant at once before the trail was cold. But he was anxious, if possible, to be present when Rao-Singh regained consciousness, if ever. A statement from his lips would simplify his task considerably. That was his first duty. The officer therefore pounced upon the wounded man as soon as the whiskey took effect and Rao-Singh's eyes be-

gan to open a little. The Hindu turned slightly and groaned.

"Who shot you?" Officer Delaney bellowed almost into his ear.

"Now, officer," the doctor remonstrated, "that can wait a little."

"Not if this man is going to die." He turned to Rao-Singh and voiced his own hastily formed conclusion. "Did this man shoot you?" He grasped Dudley by the sleeve of his coat.

The Hindu's eyes opened a little further, enough to comprehend Dudley's presence, and a grim smile played round his pain-tightened lips. There was silence a moment, and then he seemed about to speak. Were his lips forming Carmelita's name? Dudley thought they were! He must fend that off at any cost.

"Yes, I shot him, officer," he said quietly.

"I found the gun in his hand," Dhinn put in eagerly, growing bolder now that his master was conscious to back him.

In the right hand of Rao-Singh, which lay exposed away from the eyes of the doctor and the policeman, was a little piece of torn black chiffon still tightly clutched. It had come from Carmelita's gown, Dudley was sure as he caught sight of it. She had shot him in self-defense probably. That was some consolation then as far as her part in the matter went. He

would not believe she had gone to his rooms for a discreditable purpose, despite the fact that circumstances pointed against her. This man, lying there now with that terrible, malicious smile upon his dark, grayed face and quite willing to have Dudley suffer his revenge in place of Carmelita if Dudley desired it, was capable of anything. He had lured her there, he *must* have.

Rao-Singh had lapsed again into unconsciousness and the piece of chiffon had slipped from his fingers. It lay not three feet from Dudley's hand, and the rest of the occupants of the room for a moment were not looking in his direction. He took a cautious step backward, snatched up the tell-tale evidence, and thrust it into his trousers pocket. It was just in time, for the policeman turned toward him with a grin and remarked in that exasperatingly cheerful voice of his, "I'll take you along, I guess. And what is the name?" He had in his hand one of those little notebooks that policemen can always flourish at a second's notice, and his stubby pencil was poised to write.

"Dudley Drake," and he answered a few other identifying questions.

"All right. Let's get going," and the policeman indicated the stairs leading below.

Dudley thought that Rao-Singh had opened

his eyes a little to watch him leave in the hands of the law but he could not be sure.

Arrived below, Officer Delaney inquired from Dhinn the location of the telephone. Dudley guessed that he was going to ask for the patrol wagon. He would be taken to the county jail, located in the basement of the new concrete court house at Hedgewood. Nothing would start the tongues wagging and the reporters running as the sound of that patrol gong clanging through the night. There would be publicity enough about this case later, heavens knew, and he couldn't hope to keep Carmelita out of it altogether. But for the present the more quietly things were done the better.

"I say, officer," Dudley offered pleasantly enough, considering the circumstances, "couldn't I call a taxi and go to jail that way? Your motorcycle's outside, I know, and you can ride right alongside so there'll be no chance of my getting away. I'd appreciate it a lot if I could arrange it that way."

Officer Delaney was not a bad scout. Moreover, he preferred men of his own color to the rather unpleasant-looking wounded Hindu who lay upstairs and he knew that the driver of the patrol would not be joyed at having his poker game interrupted at this hour of the night if it could be avoided.

"Of course, it ain't exactly regulation," Delaney admitted, "but I guess it will be all right. I got my gat right here and I'll pop you off if you try any funny work, you can bank on that." He was an extraordinary fellow, seeming to take a childish pleasure in thoughts of crime and sudden death.

So he gave Central the number of the taxi company instead of the jail. In the interval they waited he ordered Dudley to come into the study again with him while he noted the position of the blood marks upon the Oriental rugs and questioned the three other Hindu servants through Dhinn as an interpreter.

Thus it happened that there were none of the curious on hand when the Ford sedan drove up to the curb in front of the court house and Officer Delaney parked his motorcycle not two feet in its wake. The civilian from the taxi paid his fare while the policeman stood beside him, and the two walked around the side of the building to the entrance to the jail. A grizzled, florid-faced sergeant sat behind the desk, and Dudley had to detail the same information he had given Delaney over again.

"Would you care to write out a statement?" asked the sergeant.

There flashed through Dudley's mind the only thing he remembered from a college prank that had brought him into contact with the

Princeton police—a classmate saying sagely, "Never write out a statement for the cops. They always try to get you to do it, and it always gets you in bad later. See a lawyer first."

Dudley shook his head in the negative, and the sergeant, to Dudley's relief, said indifferently, "Oh, all right."

Two reserve policemen were looking up curiously from their pinochle game in the opposite corner of the room at the news of a shooting. Dudley felt the cold-shower effect of the brisk, businesslike hostility with which the police treat people whom they are detaining under suspicion. To a man arrested for the first time and innocent of the charge against him the cold-blooded manner in which the police take it for granted he is guilty and treat him accordingly in their preliminary dealings with him is very depressing. The warm outside world seems miles away, though it may be just the other side of the grated window.

Everybody in the room seemed to Dudley to be arrayed against him. It would be wise to notify somebody, to set them working in his interest.

Notify Carmelita? That wouldn't do. She was in a highly nervous state no doubt, being excitable by nature anyway, and she might come rushing down and give the whole thing

away. There was only one other person—Sanford Drake. Yesterday Dudley would have balked at asking aid from his uncle; but after their intimate talk that morning and the surprising interest the elder Drake seemed to take in his welfare, he was sure the financier would respond. Sanford Drake was level-headed, a man of the world, and he could put him in touch with a good lawyer.

The sergeant behind the high desk was still scratching entries in the police blotter. "I'd like to make a long-distance call," Dudley addressed Delaney.

"It strikes me you'd like to do a lot of things that ain't permitted."

Dudley essayed flattery. "You've been mighty decent to me, officer, and I appreciate the way you've handled this thing. I know you won't prevent me from telling my only relative about the fix I'm in."

"What do you say, Jim?" Delaney spoke up to the sergeant, who answered, "Guess it won't do any harm." And Delaney reached down the telephone from beside the sergeant. Delaney rather liked this quiet, well set up young fellow and wondered how it had all happened. Probably a woman. Delaney sighed.

Dudley rang his uncle's number in Greenwich. Sanford Drake retired at ten usually

and it was nearly that then. But after a session of whirring and buzzing and relaying operators, his voice came over the wire.

"I'm in a mess," Dudley told him, "and at present I'm being held at the Hedgewood County Jail. I think you can help me very much if you could run out here to-morrow some time." . . . "No, not an automobile accident or speeding—more serious than that—a shooting." . . . "I am being held for it." . . . "You will? That's fine. No, I have no lawyer in mind. Any one you get will be a good man, I know." . . . "No, she doesn't know anything about it. I'll probably call her in the morning. She's asleep now."

He meticulously paid the sergeant the price of the Greenwich call. Then Delaney led him away through the door that opened upon the tier of cells and picked out the cleanest and coolest of the two that were unoccupied.

"It ain't the Ritz," offered Delaney, "but you might do worse."

Dudley nodded. An Italian recovering from a Volstead jag was muttering in Sicilian in the next cell. The jail was new and stuffy and smelt of varnish. When Delaney left him, Dudley sat upon the hard cot wearily, his head in his hands, and reviewed this gladdest, maddest, saddest day of his life. He had

thrown himself into the breach to defend Carmelita's name because it seemed the only thing to do.

If any one had told Dudley that there was anything heroic in his self-sacrifice he would have honestly denied it. To a person with his ideals of honor it was as logical an action as permitting the women and children to leave a burning ship first. Whether she was worthy of his action, whether the shooting of Rao-Singh had been preceded by something that would forever kill his love for her, would develop later. There had been no time to ask questions. He had done the thing that instinctively appealed to him as right. The striking business success and fortune he had won on the morning of that hectic day were far back in his mind now; it seemed ages away. He had not asked himself what this new burden he had taken on his shoulders would mean to his business career, his life.

What the future held for him he didn't know, but it loomed up like a huge black cloud without the sign of a silver lining. That much he admitted to himself.

He stretched out upon the hard cot, certain that he would not sleep during the remainder of the hours of darkness. But presently his utterly wearied body conquered his mind, and when he awoke it was broad daylight.

CHAPTER XXI

STEAMING pork and beans for breakfast on a hot end-of-August morning were a new sensation for Dudley and he had never seen such a smeary, thick cup as the one in which they served him the purple coffee. But he found to his surprise that he was hungry and thoroughly relished his meal.

He was quite cheerful when Officer Delaney appeared to take him before the judge. His fellow prisoner in the courtroom was the now sobered Italian. The judge was old and his skin fit too tightly over his jaw bones. He emitted a slight and unexpected whistle when enunciating words with an "s" sound. Under other circumstances it would have been funny.

The Italian was summoned first and Judge Rossbottom, gazing at the repentant roisterer over ancient silver-rimmed glasses, insulted the eighteenth amendment by fining him $5.00 and letting him go. When it came Dudley's turn to stand before him, the Judge addressed Officer Delaney, "Have you heard anything this morning about the condition of the man who was shot?"

"He's been taken to the Soundview Hospital. They said over the telephone he was still in critical shape." Dudley wondered if that grin were frozen into Delaney's face.

"The charge is," said the Judge crisply, "felonious assault with intent to kill. If Prince Rao-Singh dies, it will be changed to murder in the first degree. The trial will be set later. Meantime, you will hold the prisoner here."

"But I can get bail—any amount," Dudley started to protest.

"Not in a case of this kind," the Judge dismissed his offer and would listen to no more.

Dudley began to realize what he was really up against. Rao-Singh hated him as only an Oriental can hate, and the Hindu possessed unlimited resources. He would do anything in the world to send him to jail for a long term. Moreover, Rao-Singh would probably drag Carmelita into the case if he possibly could. Whatever the wounded man's feelings for Carmelita had once been, and Dudley shuddered to think what they probably were, he without a doubt was now blazing with an intense anger against her, because she had resisted him and then shot him. At least Rao-Singh would feel that way as soon as he was strong enough. And the newspapers would leap upon this angle of the case with a whoop of joy. A

young American husband had shot a millionaire Hindu prince. The American had for several months been living practically apart from his beautiful young Spanish wife, who was a neighbor of the glamorous victim and seen in his company almost every day. It wouldn't take an alert reporter for a New York yellow newspaper fifteen minutes to gather these facts, evolve jealousy as the motive for the shooting and work it into a story rich in spicy hints, "it is saids" and scandalous innuendoes and probably illustrated with photographs of Carmelita's house and Rao-Singh's study, with an "X" indicating where the body was found. Dudley had seen this done so many times before. It was a story after a yellow reporter's heart.

In a way it was fortunate. He couldn't hope to keep Carmelita out of the case entirely anyway, and by playing up his strong motives for shooting Rao-Singh the newspapers would throw themselves and the public off the real scent. Meantime he had better get in touch with Carmelita. She had been on his mind ever since that astounding sight of her escaping through Rao-Singh's French windows. He was fearfully anxious to know the real story of what had happened and worried to know what she was doing now. He was only too well aware of her fiery impulsiveness on oc-

casion. She would be eager to learn what had caused his disappearance. And there were the reporters who would probably come storming her house during the day—

As if an echo of his fear he now became aware that Officer Delaney, about to take him back to his cell, was warding off a noisy, thin young man who seemed bent upon approaching Dudley.

"Git away!" finally roared Delaney and put an enormous hand upon the noisy one's chest and fairly flung him to one side.

"That's that fresh young reporter," he commented to Dudley when they were walking down the corridor leading from the courtroom to the cell tier. "He wanted to talk to you, and I guessed you didn't care to have him, eh? One word to him and he'll haye every paper in New York down here."

They had to pass through the room where Dudley had been received the night before. He remembered the telephone.

"I wonder if I could 'phone my wife?" Dudley asked suddenly.

"Well—if you're quick about it, maybe," Delaney, having vanquished a reporter, one of his natural enemies, was feeling generous.

"Thanks. If you could step outside in the corridor a second. I can't get away, you know."

"Well, you got your nerve with you." But Delaney obeyed.

When Dudley got his number and Carmelita's almost hysterical voice came rushing over the wire, after he had told her where he was, though not why, he was glad he had taken the precaution to lure the officer out of earshot. She was excited, almost incoherent, and he had difficulty gathering from her torrent of words that she would be right down.

An hour later he looked up from his sitting posture on his rude bunk at the sound of feet shuffling outside to find the grinning Delaney standing beside Carmelita. The sight of her white face, the dark circles under her eyes, her general appearance of wretchedness filled him with fear and tenderness.

She had not slept the night before. Fortunate in not meeting a soul in her wild flight from the scene of the shooting, she had had barely strength enough to struggle up to her bedroom. There she had paced the floor practically all night, interrupting her nervous walking at intervals to fling herself upon the bed in a vain attempt to sleep or to sink into the chair in front of her dressing table and, turning her half-nude back around, gaze with fresh terror upon the cruel mark of the indignity she had suffered, the inflamed Bengal tiger seal of Rao-Singh that seemed burning

through her back into her heart. At daylight, because she knew her maid would be knocking soon, she mustered strength enough to disrobe and don a negligée and pretend to have just awakened. A cup of strong coffee was her breakfast, and then had come the telephone call from Dudley and his astounding news.

Delaney was unlocking Dudley's cell. "Youse can talk down in the witness room." He was making a great concession. But he was kind of sorry for this fellow, and the lady would be a corker if she weren't feeling so badly. Dudley walked out of the cell and she flung herself into his arms, kissing him, choking sobs. Delaney led the way two doors down on the other side of the corridor and, closing them inside, stepped out to stand sentry at the door.

"Oh, Dudley, what are you doing in this awful place?" she cried when they were alone. She was hoping the reason was not what she feared, that he had not by any chance become involved in her own great trouble.

Dudley Drake was one of those perhaps fortunate people who frequently lose their heads completely in the face of petty annoyances but who in the midst of important crises are able to summon forth an unnatural calm that leaves the mind free to function and keeps the emotions firmly in check.

"You will have to speak more quietly," he cautioned her gently. "The officer is just outside the door. And please try to pull yourself together." She tried. He carried two chairs as far away as possible from Delaney's post. She sat down obediently and he took his seat opposite and very close to her. "We are in a fearful fix, Carmelita," he said. "We might as well face the facts at once. I had reason to believe you were in trouble after you left me last night. I followed you to Rao-Singh, arriving just as you came through the window and started to run home. I went into the study through the same window and—well, Rao-Singh was shot. I was arrested, and I admitted I shot him."

He paused. He would give her the chance to deny entire responsibility in the matter even to him, even though she must know he was aware of the real assailant of Rao-Singh, if she wished to. She could accept his sacrifice entirely without telling him the truth.

Her tired eyes were wide as she looked into his, as if she were living over again the scenes of the night before. "I can't let you do that, Dudley," she cried softly, remembering his injunction about Delaney. "You must know —I shot him—myself." Her head sank forward a little. There was a full moment of silence.

"Why? Why did you sham a telephone call from Lucy Hodge and go to him?"

His voice contained pity for her but it was insistent in its questioning. Face twisted with emotion, she came to her resolve at last. She would tell him everything, get rid of this awful thing that had been weighing down her very heart for so many weeks. If it killed.

There is a blessed relief in confession which a guiltless person can never know. That is the psychology behind an important tenet of one of the world's greatest religions. In the mind of the guilty one whatever punishment follows the confession cannot be as bad as the guilt which is eating their very soul.

If it killed his love for her forever, Carmelita would tell him. And so she slipped, almost without her own volition, off the chair and down upon the floor in a miserable heap at his feet.

"I will tell you, Dudley, I will tell you everything," she began and in her recital she began back at her first visit to Canary Cottage and related in pitiless detail the whole miserable account of her weakness and deception—the lie she had told him about receiving a huge sum of money from her mother's will, her disastrous gambling, the true source of the necklace he had found caught in the safe, her frantic efforts to pay her debts and her misuse of

the charity funds, and finally the events leading up to her clandestine visit to Rao-Singh the night before and its tragic termination. She did not spare herself in the slightest but there was one point upon which she insisted with frantic emphasis—she had been guilty of no wrongdoing with Rao-Singh, she had never cared in the slightest for the Hindu, and whatever Dudley's attitude might be toward her from now on she would always love her husband.

"I don't expect you—to love me now—but—but please, please—believe me." And suddenly she broke down completely. She buried her pain-seared face in his lap and gave way to the sobs that racked her.

Dudley Drake was only human. He stared straight ahead of him at the brick wall opposite. Her whole life since she had left the apartment then had been a sham. She had deceived him at every turn, and it hurt him deeply. Her hat had fallen upon the concrete floor and he was stroking her dark mass of hair, muttering words of comfort without meaning them or knowing what he was doing. He had told her once that he believed their marriage a mistake, and he wondered if he hadn't made the biggest mistake of all in rushing in and sacrificing himself for her now that he had heard this heartbreaking confession.

But as she continued to sob and he looked down upon her helpless, racked body, a softer mood came upon him.

She had made a great sacrifice for him too. She could have had any luxury money could buy—armies of servants, motors, gowns, admirers—and she had forsaken it all to elope with him, a poor man, in Paris. He had taken her to a stifling three-room prison—what a terrible place it must have seemed to her!—and denied her every pleasure she had been taught to crave, forgetting everything in his determination to grow rich quickly by pursuing Chartres and closing with him. And, after all, she had just been a pawn of fate. She had taken an initial false step, and knowing her, he could appreciate how it happened. And the rest of her trouble had followed as a perfectly natural consequence. Like pulling out the bottom card of a stack.

Whatever she had done, she was the woman he loved, his wife. He would forgive her! He would—

And suddenly his overwhelming love for her assailed him in a warm stream he could not deny, and tears were rolling unchecked down his own eyes. He took her head between his two hands and raised her face almost roughly to his and rained upon her mouth, her eyes, her forehead the kisses that made her live again.

In an instant he recovered control of himself and freed one hand to dig it into his eyes and wipe away the evidence of his weakness. He was trying to smile.

"It's all right, sweetheart," he murmured. "We'll stick together. I'll see you through."

It seemed too wonderful to her to believe, and she was softly weeping tears of relief now, while he tried to comfort her. Soon she recovered also and was facing him bravely. Indeed she was the first to speak again.

"I cannot let you sacrifice yourself for me, Dudley. I am entirely to blame, as I have just told you. I will go to the policeman out there and confess. Let them put me in jail—I can stand anything now, now that I know you still love me—if only they will set you free."

"That would be foolish, dearest," he reasoned gently with her. "For one thing they would not believe you. And for the other a man can get along so much better in a—matter of this kind than a woman. Once *you* were mixed up in this, your name would be smirched forever, you would be finished. With me it is different. Rao-Singh is not going to die—he can't. I shall get out of this all right, never fear."

She would have rushed out yet had he not seized her by the wrist.

"But, Dudley—" she began unconvinced.

"*Please*—leave this whole trouble entirely to me. I absolutely forbid you to confess or say a word about it to anybody. Especially the reporters—please be very careful with them. They will come flocking around, never fear. I've telephoned my uncle and he's coming down to-day. He will probably attend to all the legal details for me, and we couldn't have a better man. So there's nothing for you to do but go home quietly and wait and be brave. And—I forgive you for everything, and I love you." He took her again in his arms and kissed her. As he released her, still protesting against the course he had outlined for her, Delaney opened the door, coughing discreetly. Dudley watched her walk slowly away from him down the corridor toward the outer air, and he knew that for the time being he could rely upon her to be silent. Though for how long—

CHAPTER XXII

WEALTH and personality is the modern magic formula for opening gates and softening the heart of officialdom. Watch the traffic policeman's forbidding hand drop to a respectable salute when the millionaire rides by in his limousine. Or—

The assistant warden came to Dudley's cell at three in the afternoon to tell him that his uncle and another gentleman were outside and that he might use the witness room to speak to them in. Officer Delaney had gone on patrol duty. Moreover the assistant warden felt that somebody of more importance than a mere policeman should be announcing the arrival of a personage of such evident wealth and distinguished appearance as Sanford Drake. There would be no trouble about arranging a quiet place for them to talk with the prisoner, no trouble at all, sir.

The assistant warden closed the door behind him and Dudley advanced gravely to meet his uncle. He was anxious about how the banker was going to take his call upon him for assistance. His greeting was cordial but business-

like. He introduced the stocky, well-groomed man of forty-five who stood beside him. "This is Gordon Kendall, my lawyer—Dudley Drake, my nephew. And now let's hear what's up." Kendall was attorney for Drake and Porter and one of the best and most expensive lawyers in New York.

The three took chairs and Dudley gave a carefully expurgated version of the shooting. At the end he saw that the lawyer, who had been regarding him with cold, shrewd eyes all through his recital, was far from satisfied.

Gordon Kendall cleared his throat. "The first thing to be done between lawyer and client in a case of this kind is to establish an absolutely frank understanding. There never was a man shot in the world without a motive, unless it was pure accident, and you admit it wasn't accident in this case. You simply say you went to Prince Rao-Singh's study and shot him because you hated him. Why? Your uncle tells me that you were unusually fortunate in business yesterday and you left early to tell your wife the good news. Did you find something amiss at home? Why did you leave what must have been an extremely happy meeting with Mrs. Drake to invade this Hindu's property and shoot him?"

But Dudley insisted stubbornly that he had told the whole story. He had resolved not to

discuss Carmelita's part in the affair even with his own lawyer or his uncle.

"Very well," Kendall said finally, concealing a slight exasperation. "Here's what the newspapers are saying about it."

He pulled the yellowest of the New York yellows out of his coat pocket and Dudley saw the screaming headlines:

JEALOUSY MOTIVE OF LOVE-TRIANGLE SHOOTING

"I'll Kill You!" Husband Threatened as He Saw Wife Kissed by Millionaire Hindu Admirer.

Long Island Society Shocked by Scandal Uncovered in Drake-Rao-Singh Tragedy.

The scavengers of the press were on the job early. They had evidently been doing some detective work around the countryside.

"Did you make the threat that you would kill him?" Dudley admitted that much. "There's no use denying that things look mighty black for you, Drake," the lawyer went on. "You threaten to kill this man and the next thing his servants find him on the floor, shot, and you are alone in the room with him with a gun in your hand. You admit in the presence of the doctor and a policeman that

you shot him. Rao-Singh is in a serious condition in the Soundview Hospital. If he lives and you're convicted, it means a sentence of anywhere up to thirty years in the penitentiary. If he dies, you stand a good chance of the chair. In view of your precarious situation, aren't there any circumstances at all connected with the shooting that you can tell me that will give us a chance to build up a case?"

"There are no secrets between a lawyer and his client, you know, Dudley," his uncle put in.

Dudley sensed that these two shrewd men suspected that he was holding something back. Well, let them. He would give them no satisfaction.

"You don't look to me like a person who would deliberately shoot a man in cold blood and what I can get about you from your uncle confirms that impression," the lawyer said not unkindly as he picked up his hat preliminary to leaving. "I don't like to doubt your word and I think you're foolish to keep me in the dark about anything in this case if I'm going to defend you. But I think you are trying to protect somebody—Mrs. Drake possibly, since her name has already come into the case. However—see you to-morrow at the preliminary hearing."

Sanford Drake lingered for a moment for a word alone with his nephew. "I'm going to

stand by you in this thing and if there's any other way you think I can help you, let me know. But I really believe the best help could come from yourself if you'd let it." His voice was gruff but his intentions were good and he patted Dudley awkwardly upon the back as he gathered his hat and cane.

"There's only one thing I'll ask," said Dudley as he was leaving. "I want you and Mr. Kendall to promise positively not to question Carmelita about this whole wretched business. She's innocent in the whole affair and she knows nothing about the shooting. I don't want her put on the stand or mixed up in the case in any way as far as my angle of it is concerned." For the first time during their visit Dudley was showing some emotion. Sanford Drake looked at him sharply and then he gave in with a shrug of the shoulder. "Very well. We had planned to see her before we went back to town but I dare say we'll have to respect your wishes. I really think though that you are making a mistake."

At the preliminary hearing the next day Dudlay Drake was indicted for felonious assault with intent to kill and the trial was set for two weeks hence. Dhinn, the three other Hindu servants, Officer Delaney, and the physician who attended Rao-Singh were the chief witnesses. Dudley had little, if anything, to say.

The only bright news to him was the report from the hospital that Rao-Singh's condition was improving and that the doctors now believed that he would recover.

Gordon Kendall was an excellent lawyer of long practice. He didn't mind difficult cases that taxed his highly developed wits, but he could not help but regard the case of Dudley Drake as rather hopeless from the start. The chain of guilt seemed irrefutable. There was nothing to indicate that his client had not done the shooting as he declared except the reluctance of Gordon Kendall, a shrewd judge of men, to believe such a cleancut altogether splendid fellow as Drake could have invaded a man's house and shot him down and the reluctance of Dudley to discuss the case when he got down to specific details and especially when the name of Carmelita Drake was involved.

Kendall had met Carmelita at the preliminary hearing. Even in her present low physical and mental state, she was a strikingly beautiful woman. Did she know more about her husband's actions on that fatal night than she cared to, or he would permit her to, tell? Drake had insisted that she should not be questioned. When the indictment was brought in against her husband, she had nearly fainted. But then any wife might.

Kendall suffered another misgiving when he learned that the prosecution of Dudley's case was to be in charge of David Banning. The regular district attorney of the county was away upon a vacation, and Banning was the special attorney put in charge in his absence. Kendall had opposed Banning before. He was a slight, dark, snarling man with vaulting ambitions and no scruples. His system was to win cases no matter how justice suffered in the process. Kendall believed privately that the special attorney's professional honor was not above reproach. Rao-Singh, now recovered enough to take an interest in the case, would have in Banning an ideal tool through which to work his revenge upon Dudley.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE same impulse which leads little boys and girls to tear the wings from butterflies and tie cans to cats' tails impels them later in life to fill the audience chairs at criminal trials at which human life and freedom are at stake.

Long lines of motors hugged the curbs on both sides of Hedgewood's main street on the morning Dudley Drake's trial opened at the tidy new courthouse. The case was a seven days' wonder. The New York papers, suffering a late August paucity of sensations, had kept it upon the front page and lavished upon it their best trial reporters, photographers, sob sisters, and rapid-fire sketch artists. Reporters had penetrated by bribery and fraud to Dudley's cell, only to meet with a stony silence when they sweatingly attained their goal. Sob sisters had invaded the grounds of Carmelita's house but Carmelita's stalwart and sympathetic butler had proven an effective menace. Minions of the press had even sought to storm the private ward of the Soundview Hospital but Rao-Singh had sent down curt word that he was seeing nobody.

But they could not be kept out of the court-

room. Neither could the nattily dressed women of the Hedgewood summer colony and the other resorts for miles around who regarded it as much more thrilling than dashing into town for the matinee and who flocked into the hot, stuffy courtroom to stare particularly at Carmelita's obvious distress and to whisper in rapid undertones until warned by the bailiff. Neither could the scattering of native Hedgewoodian women nor the contingent of males of no particular occupation and description which one inevitably finds attending trials everywhere.

Carmelita had insisted upon attending the trial though she could do nothing more than sit beside Dudley behind the long, flat table just under the judge's bench and squeeze his hand encouragingly at intervals. Gordon Kendall, sitting on the other side of Dudley, thought grimly that he could not even do that much. It looked like a prearranged affair. Sanford Drake, his hands resting upon the head of his cane and his slate eyes looking fixedly straight ahead, sat in the front row just the other side of the railing that divided off the principals in the case. Also in the front row but nearer the jury box were two very fat, turbaned Hindus. No one knew who they were but Gordon Kendall had observed them talking to Banning before the trial and he

judged that they were there in an unofficial capacity in Rao-Singh's interest. Lawyers with no good purpose probably.

David Banning was right in his element. He had observed with satisfaction the large and well-groomed audience and the extensive array of reporters. He always cultivated reporters. He tried to arrange his conduct of cases so as to provide a "big punch" for both the morning and afternoon editions. He always talked freely and confidently to the newspapers. They had already printed his statement that this case was an open and shut affair and that Dudley Drake would be on his way to the penitentiary for a long sentence by the following evening at the latest.

There had been little trouble in getting a jury. The talesmen called had been about equally divided between transplanted New York commuters and native Long Islanders, ordinary people with ordinary intelligence. Many admitted they had read about the case already in the papers and formed opinions in advance, and Kendall found that this was practically the only ground upon which he could exercise his challenging right. He had determined upon a defense that admitted Dudley had done the shooting but maintained that it had occurred through a combination of accident and self-defense.

Dudley had gone to the home of Rao-Singh, according to this version, and the Hindu had attacked him. During the scuffle the revolver which the Hindu carried had exploded and shot him. This story, Kendall admitted, could be rather easily poked full of holes, and the only plausible things about it were the favorable impression Dudley's personality was bound to make upon the jury and the fact that the shooting had been done with Rao-Singh's own revolver. Moreover, though he did not tell his client this, Kendall had encouraged Carmelita in her determination to be present at the trial and sit beside her husband. A lovely lady in distress can wring sympathy from the most hard-hearted of male jurors. For this reason Banning was laboring to have as many women as possible in the jury box, and the jury when completed and impaneled consisted of nine men and three women.

The foreman was the owner of the Hedgewood stationery and paper store, a sleepy little man who seemed utterly without emotions. As Kendall lounged there, tapping his pencil upon the pile of papers spread before him and whispering instructions to the young Harvard Law graduate, his assistant, who sat on the other side of him, he wondered how much influence the reputed great wealth and power and mystery which surrounded Prince

Rao-Singh would have upon these nine good men—and three good women—and true. The newspapers had played up the glamorous Oriental angle of the case with great colorful effect. These people in the jury box were not over-intelligent and probably superstitious. Would they believe some Oriental curse would fall upon them if they did not assist this absent Indian potentate in his revenge? Stranger things had happened during Kendall's long experience in the courts.

The trial opened and proceeded with clock-like regularity and precision after the noon recess. The morning had been consumed in assembling the jury. Special Attorney Banning called Rao-Singh's major-domo, Dhinn, as the first witness. Dhinn told of coming upon Dudley Drake standing, a gun in his hand, over the wounded body of his master. He identified Dudley and the gun. Kendall waived cross-examination.

Rao-Singh's other three servants testified, through an interpreter, as to their rôles in the affair, and Kendall asked them a few inconsequential questions tending to show that they had not been present as soon after the shooting or seen as much as they had declared. He succeeded in impugning the veracity of the witnesses somewhat but accomplished little.

Officer Delaney was called.

"Yes, he said, 'I shot him,'" he testified with evident reluctance under Banning's sharp questioning and a little tense rustle ran through the audience.

Then Banning called two witnesses whom Dudley and Carmelita had not noted before and whom Dudley, for one, recognized after some difficulty, though their names meant nothing to him. They were the two gossiping women who had discussed the scandal about Carmelita and Rao-Singh in his presence the night of the fête while Carmelita was auctioning her kiss, the two women who had aroused in him the mad desire to throttle their slanderous tongues. Banning put these two women, obviously dressed elaborately for the occasion and most conscious of their importance, upon the stand one after the other, and both testified that they had heard Dudley cry as he leaped up and interrupted Carmelita and Rao-Singh about to dance, "If you don't let my wife alone—I'll kill you!"

At this point the trial was adjourned until ten o'clock the next morning.

Kendall and Dudley would have agreed with the slowly departing audience that the prosecution had scored at every turn and that David Banning was quite justified in the grin which he flung toward them as he started scooping up his papers into his briefcase. Dudley

aroused himself out of his blue funk sufficiently to respond to the fervent kiss of Carmelita before the bailiff led him back to his cell.

Sanford Drake, having waited until the stream of the departing curious had filtered by, let himself through the gate into the railed enclosure and greeted Carmelita and the lawyer. His usually immobile face showed the strain he was under.

"Not going so well, eh, Kendall?" he demanded brusquely.

Kendall looked around cautiously, saw that Banning and his cohorts had departed, and admitted, "No, I'll put my man on the stand to-morrow. He's our only hope. No use trying to shake these people's stories to-day. They had the goods."

They appeared to be ignoring Carmelita. She stood beside the lawyer listening, one hand clutching the rail. Neither Kendall nor Sanford Drake wished to look her in the eye. They were still talking together as she walked out a little in front of them. When the lawyer and Sanford Drake reached the street through a side door to avoid the curious, they stepped into the banker's limousine, still paying no attention to her.

The limousine had gone a block in the direction of New York when Sanford Drake put

a question and the lawyer answered, "If she would only talk to me of her own free will and tell me what her part, if any, was in the actual shooting. But I'm bound to respect Drake's demands not to question her, however foolish and quixotic they are. Besides, maybe we're both wrong and she doesn't know a thing more about it than he says she does."

"Well, I'm for her," the elder Drake responded, trying to appear as gruff as possible. "She's been foolish, but I think she's got the stuff in her. And she's stood by my nephew in great style so far. I think now that she's doing all she can."

Which shows how far wrong astute business men can be at times.

Carmelita saw Lucy Hodge getting into her sport car up the street, half a block. Lucy had not been near her since the day before the shooting. Probably she was on the side of Rao-Singh. For a moment Carmelita stood uncertainly in the doorway of the courthouse. She was utterly wretched. Dudley was somewhere inside there in a terrible cell and she was helpless to assist him. His lawyer and his uncle had not consulted her, and her promise to Dudley forbade her to go to them with the truth or stand up and confess it in court. Wasn't there anything—

It had not required the ominous words ex-

changed between Sanford Drake and Dudley's lawyer to convince her that things were going very badly. They would convict him, there was no doubt of that, convict him and send him to Sing Sing—for something she had done! Couldn't she—

It flashed into her head: Perhaps Rao-Singh would be willing to call the case off—for a price!

Since opposing the Hindu was leading nowhere, perhaps yielding to him would yet save Dudley!

Carmelita would do a brave, foolish thing. She would plead with Rao-Singh, however much she loathed and feared the very sight of him; and, whatever his price, she would now pay.

She had hired a car for the day and it was waiting a few steps away. A few people, recognizing her, watched her with mixed feelings and excited whispers as she entered and sank wearily into the seat. Not until the driver had proceeded a block in the direction of her home did she tell him another destination. She wished to go to the Long Island Railroad station at Tuckerville, she said. Tuckerville was halfway between Hedgewood and Soundview. Even in the impetuosity with which she had entered upon this adventure she realized the need for caution.

Fifteen minutes later the taxi had delivered her at the Tuckerville station and she paid the driver and dismissed him. It was a smaller town than Hedgewood and she had some difficulty locating what she wanted in an imitation of a department store. Even in her haste Carmelita was characteristically careful in selecting just the style of black veiling to match her black toque hat and the becoming black, silk gown she was wearing. Her purchase made, she returned to the station and hailed a local Tuckerville taxi and instructed the driver to take her to the Soundview Hospital.

Prince Rao-Singh had said that "Mrs. Dudley" might come up at once, the one-legged man in charge of the telephone switchboard sent word in by a trim, antiseptic nurse to the black-veiled lady waiting in the tiny reception room. The elevator had just stopped at the main floor. The elevator's speed was regulated for stretcher-cases and Carmelita wondered if she would ever reach the private ward on the third floor and get her mission over with. The floor nurse in the little cubbyhole office at the head of the stairs escorted her down the corridor to the last room on the right. The nurse opened the lid that fit over the glass peep-hole in the door and then said disapprovingly, "You may go in, madame." And Car-

melita was alone in the room with Rao-Singh.

He lay propped up with pillows, his gaunt cheek-bones very prominent and almost gray in the failing afternoon light. The truth was that he was much more nearly well than he looked. He had been walking around the ward for three days with no ill effects. But to Carmelita, who was used to seeing him in his full vigor, he seemed fearfully pale, and a pang of remorse shot through her. This was dispelled somewhat by the malicious smile upon his lips. He no longer seemed to desire her. His face expressed only a gloating revenge, a deep hostility toward her. He had permitted her to come up to him so that he might laugh at her.

"I have come to appeal to you to save my husband," she began tensely. "You know he is innocent. I will pay you anything in the world if you will drop this case."

"I have heard you say that before, my dear lady," he replied, and his voice was unpleasant and surprisingly steady. "Even if it were not too late now to drop the case and save your husband, I would not do so for all the money in the world."

Her tones became very low and trembling. "And if, to save him, I do not pay you in money—if I come to you—if—"

To Rao-Singh the moment was more deli-

cious than he could ever have hoped for. This woman, did she think she still tempted him, she who had tried to take his life, the life of a noble of India? He laughed full into her lowered, flushed face, "You pay with yourself? Have you come here to mock me? You—cheat me again? When you disrobe to-night, dear lady, turn your back to your mirror and look over your shoulder at what is written there!"

She stood stunned and broken for a moment. Then she turned toward the door with his guttural mocking laugh following her.

CHAPTER XXIV

Special Attorney David Banning hinted by the difficulty with which he restrained the smile upon his thin face upon the second morning of Dudley Drake's trial that he had a very special sensation in store for the large audience and his friends, the reporters. Banning was very well pleased with himself. The evening papers had been crammed with news of the case. There were photographs, which he had graciously furnished, of himself and sketches made on the spot of Carmelita, with especial note of her stylish black gown and toque, of Dudley, of Lawyer Kendall, and of Judge McIntyre. Banning was sorry he had been unable to furnish his friends, the reporters, with some spicier aspects of the case, but he had been afraid to put the most romantic figure in the room, Carmelita Drake, upon the stand for fear her testimony, while derogatory to herself, would on the whole aid the prisoner's cause. Had Kendall called her as a witness for the defense, he, Banning, would have taken great pleasure in hurling mud at her.

But the reporters had done very well by themselves without the handicap of the facts. They had all but announced in as many words that Rao-Singh was Carmelita's lover. "On very intimate terms" was the favorite locution in describing their relations. And a sob sister had written a touching fantasy in the Freudian manner in which she proved that women of hot Latin temperament are never satisfied with the ardor of American husbands but must inevitably turn to men of Latin or tropical appeal if their love-life is to be satisfied—with references to the Drake-Rao-Singh case to prove the point.

Fortunately newspapers were not allowed in Dudley's cell and Carmelita was too distracted to remember that there was a normal world in which such things as newspapers existed.

The attendance on the second day, which promised the climax of the trial, was greater than on the first, Banning noted with satisfaction. The press tables were crowded until some of the reporters were obliged to stand. There was not a vacant chair among the seats of the morbid, and many had been turned away by the perspiring bailiff.

Even before Dudley was escorted from his cell or Gordon Kendall had appeared, Carmelita walked down the center aisle, was admitted through the little gate by an attendant,

and took the same seat under the judge's bench which she had occupied the previous day. She was anxious to avoid as far as possible those cruelly curious eyes that had come to gloat over her husband's fate. She hardly raised her eyes to greet Kendall and his assistant when they arrived. For Dudley, escorted in by the bailiff, she summoned a warm smile which she was pathetically anxious to make reassuring. He responded and pressed her hand.

Dudley scanned the front row on the other side of the rail and turned uneasily to Kendall.

"My uncle is not here to-day?" He was disappointed. He felt that he would need Sanford Drake's cool head and good sense—for Carmelita, if not for himself—before that day was over.

"I haven't seen him," Kendall replied. "He'll be along presently, I fancy." But Sanford Drake did not appear, and his absence filled Dudley with a vague unrest. Had the financier deemed discretion the better part of valor and deserted the sinking ship while there was yet time? No; there was some more honorable explanation than that. Dudley was sure of it.

The courtroom rose as the red-faced Judge McIntyre, who hoped the trial would be over

early so that he could get to his golf, entered. The monotonous "Oyez, oyez" rang through the hot room. The bailiff, summoned by the judge, listened respectfully to his whispers and, securing the window pole from the corner, opened a neglected window. So intent were the eyes of the audience and the jury upon the bailiff's manipulation of the long, wobbly pole that no one seemed to note the silent entrance of Rao-Singh at the rear of the court-room. Banning's sensation as he announced his first witness of the day, "Prince Rao-Singh," with a flourish backward toward the tall, dark, turbaned Hindu, was as stunning as he could have desired.

The judge rapped violently with his gavel to quell the excited buzz that followed this announcement. Rao-Singh, pale, sweeping the court with a haughty, almost insolent smile, made his way slowly and with seeming great difficulty down the aisle toward the witness chair, assisted by Dhinn at his elbow and a cane in his other hand. A physician might have ventured the assertion that the Hindu could walk perfectly well by himself. Except for his paleness, there was no evidence that he had lately been at the point of death. His features were naturally gaunt.

Rao-Singh mounted into the witness chair and handed his cane to his servant. He was

dressed in ordinary American business clothes except for the pale blue turban that bound his head. His beady eyes flickered down for an instant and rested upon Carmelita, who looked, startled, at him, as if she were viewing a ghost. She recoiled a little under his scrutiny. Dudley, arms folded, was looking straight ahead. Kendall was surprised but offered a silent, grudging tribute to Banning's strategy. This Hindu might be thoroughly well. Probably his wound, after all, had been a superficial one. Banning had kept him in the hospital—or perhaps it was the Hindu's idea—and not ventured to produce him the first day. Now, with the case already won, he had brought him there to testify for the prosecution, preferring to take no chances.

As for Rao-Singh, he had come for his triumph.

He was sworn in. "Now, Your Highness, do you recognize the prisoner?" Banning's manner was a little obsequious. He pointed to Dudley.

"Yes, he is Dudley Drake." Rao-Singh followed Banning's finger with a malignant eye and his voice was deeply guttural.

"Do you recognize him as the person who fired the shot that wounded you?"

Rao-Singh could not forbear a quick glance at the cringing Carmelita. She was so com-

pletely in his power now. He had but to tell the truth. But Drake had seemed so anxious to rush into trouble. On the whole, he would take more pleasure in sending *him* to prison. The American had neatly wrapped the ball and chain around his own leg—well, he would not deny him the key that would turn the lock.

"Yes, Dudley Drake shot me."

Banning, with a triumphant look at Kendall, indicated that he was finished with the witness, that he would gladly turn him over to the defense for cross-examination. But Kendall's hands were tied. He would only injure an already hopeless cause, if that were possible, by permitting this Hindu to seal his client's fate even more securely. He waived the right to examine him.

Rao-Singh, helped down from the witness box by Dhinn and his cane, did not leave the courtroom. There was a vacant chair just over the rail from Banning's table beside the two corpulent Hindus who had attended both sessions of the trial, in the first row of audience seats. Rao-Singh, as if by a prearranged plan, turned in there, and his countrymen rose to let him pass. He sat down and looked out upon the proceedings much as a conquering general surveys the battlefield he has just won.

"The prosecution rests," announced Banning.

Kendall called his only witness—the prisoner. The jurymen shifted in their positions. The prosecution having offered them a dramatic moment, the defense was matching it with another. Dudley Drake was going to testify in his own behalf. Carmelita could not keep her eyes from him as he mounted the witness stand firmly. He could so easily save himself. Why did he not tell the truth? He was too fine, too good to sacrifice himself this way!

Kendall was speaking, "Mr. Drake, will you give us a frank account of your part in what happened in Prince Rao-Singh's study on the evening of Monday, August 15, the night he was shot?" Dudley wondered wearily if he had made a mistake in consenting to Kendall's urging that he testify for himself. Was it necessary to harry him any longer? He was so tired and utterly sick at heart. Let them sentence him, throw him into prison, ruin his life, but get it over with quickly. Was Kendall hoping that even yet he would come out with the secret he had been concealing?

"I went to Rao-Singh's study to talk with him," he repeated monotonously the story he had concocted to appease Kendall. "We quarreled. He seized the gun from his desk drawer.

We struggled. The gun went off and he fell to the floor. I saw that he had been shot in the side and summoned his servants. The rest you know."

It seemed to Carmelita that at last she could stand it no longer. She must shriek out the truth. She scanned the jury box and saw only incredulity and hostility on the faces of the men and women. They would condemn him.

Kendall had played his only possible card in the deck that had been stacked against him from the start—and lost. The veteran lawyer mopped his brow with his handkerchief. It was no use. He could get nothing more out of the witness. He turned him over to Banning, who seized upon him like a cat who has at last maneuvered into a position to pounce upon a particularly juicy mouse.

"Why did you go to Prince Rao-Singh's house on the night of August 15?" he snapped at Dudley.

"I decline to answer."

"What was the cause of the quarrel which you say you had with him?"

"I decline to answer." Dudley's jaw was set. He hardly seemed to be hearing the questions hurled at him, but he answered in a low, steady voice.

Banning made a motion of mock exaspera-

tion in the direction of the jury as if to say, "You see, he hasn't a leg to stand on. He is afraid to answer me."

And then he put his final question, "Am I to understand then that you decline to furnish this court with one single motive that would explain your invasion of Prince Rao-Singh's house? That you decline to state any reason whatever for this cowardly assault upon a defenseless man in his own home?"

Dudley raised his head wearily and faced his tormentor, "I shot him—that's absolutely all I care to say."

To Carmelita, sitting on the edge of her chair, digging her two hands into the table in front of her until the knuckles were white, it seemed that she *must* scream out that an injustice was being done. She swept the jury with her agonized eyes and she saw that their minds were made up. There was only one verdict, "Guilty!" and no escape. She did not hear Dudley's last words nor the curt dismissal of the witness by Banning. Dudley was stumbling past her to his chair, his shoulders slumped, his whole body like a taut spring that has been at last relaxed. A great wave of love and pity surged out of her. No, no, she could not let him do it! And suddenly the path of duty gleamed bright and broad ahead of her.

Banning was announcing to the judge that the "prosecution rests" when she sprang to her feet, eyes flashing, every nerve on the qui vive. Dudley, sensing what was going to happen, made a quick motion to catch her wrist. But she swept him aside.

"I am the guilty one!" she cried.

Her voice was a primitive, choking, half-hysterical scream.

It struck the courtroom like a thunderclap.

There was a stunned silence as she groped her way up to the witness-chair and stood there quivering with emotion.

"I shot him. My husband is innocent. He has been trying to protect me. But I can't let him go to prison—I can't!" She was shaken by sobs and she wondered if she were going to faint. But she recovered her grip upon herself and her voice rang out firmly. She was facing the jury. "I needed money desperately. I borrowed it from Rao-Singh and when I went to pay it back alone in his study—he—attacked me. I seized his gun to defend myself. In the desperate struggle the gun went off—he was shot. It was an accident, but if you would still say that I shot him—"

She seized her gown at the left shoulder and ripped it savagely to her waist.

She turned her exposed back to the jury. She pointed to the red Bengal tiger scar,

where the fiendish hate of Rao-Singh had branded her, lividly disfiguring her back forever.

"—this is my defense! It is the seal which he burns upon all of his possessions. He tried to make me his. When he couldn't, he overcame by brute force and branded me—and I shot him!"

The courtroom was in an uproar. Half of the jury was out of their seats. The spectators were all up staring, buzzing. Judge McIntyre was pounding fiercely with his gavel for order with no more effect than if the heavy mallet had been a feather. Rao-Singh sat gazing at Carmelita incredulously, sensing that the tide was turning. Carmelita had been a lovely object of pity to most of the courtroom ever since the trial started. This Hindu fiend had—the horrifying scar upon her white shoulder—the sudden stunning drama of it—

A young voice rang out loud and clear: "Lynch him!" It was enough. The ominous murmur that had denoted the mob spirit was germinating had found a nucleus. A husky farm-hand in the same row with Rao-Singh struck at him heavily with his fist. The Indian arose quickly, very quickly for a man as lame as he had purported to be, his two Hindu associates with him. They started to make their way toward the rear of the room. A score of

flaying fists blocked their way. A chair, five chairs, were overturned. A woman screamed. There was a flash of the bailiff as he flung himself into the fray. A court attendant rushed through a rear door for the police. But the police had heard the uproar and almost crashed the Paul Revere over as three of them rushed into the room, throwing themselves in the direction where the turbaned head of Rao-Singh, like the helmet of Henry of Navarre, was buffeted back and forth.

Faces scratched and eyes blackened, clothes ripped and turbans awry, the three Hindus were slowly but surely gaining the door, aided by the three policemen and the bailiff. One of the police was Patrolman Delaney, eyes alight with battle, mouth in a broad grin, having the time of his life as he wielded his nightstick. Out of the door swept the battling throng and over the broad sidewalk, where another mob of the curious was seething in from all directions. Their way momentarily cleared by the police, the Hindus made a swift dash for Rao-Singh's limousine waiting at the curb. An officer swung on the running board and drew his revolver, waving the more venturesome away with the threat of it and shouting to the Indian chauffeur, "Step on the gas, man, for God's sake." And thus Rao-Singh departed from what had been intended as his triumph.

At the first sign of the disturbance an attendant had leaped to the jury box, locked the gate, and devoted himself exclusively to keeping the jurymen in their places. Banning stood at his place facing the rear of the now almost deserted courtroom, a blank stare upon his face, trying to believe that what he had seen was something in the movies. Kendall was slowly comprehending that the tide had marvelously changed in his direction. He turned to Dudley, and Dudley was not there. But he was coming, leading Carmelita down from the witness chair to her seat behind the table.

"You are foolish, foolish," he was telling her softly. "You should have left things as they were—but I love you for it."

Kendall, all smiles, was leaning over toward her as they sat down. "I congratulate you, Mrs. Drake—you were marvelous. You've saved the day. The truth will out, you know, Drake."

Kendall proved to be a prophet. Judge McIntyre who knew that to his dying day he would never witness such a scene again in his courtroom but who nevertheless was intent upon the proprieties of the law, was again rapping for order. A few stragglers were coming back into the courtroom, standing in the rear of the room, sensing that it would

be all over before they could get to their seats.

Kendall rose and said, "The defense rests."

He was a gentleman but he could not resist a significant glance at his chagrined colleague, Banning.

Judge McIntyre made a short charge entirely favorable to the defense and delivered the case into the hands of the jury. No jury would have dared to convict. The mob was coming back, orderly now but watchful, standing twenty rows deep in the space at the rear of the courtroom. The air was electric, and the currents were all sympathetic with Mr. and Mrs. Dudley Drake.

Holmes, the foreman of the jury, proprietor of the Hedgewood stationery and newspaper store, seemed to have been waiting for the moment when he could take an active hand. He now bustled among the other jurors. There were emphatic nods as he asked each the same question. And his fat smiling face wore a broad grin as he turned to the judge and nodded also.

"Has the jury arrived at a verdict?" asked Judge McIntyre, as if he could not guess in advance that they had.

An attendant motioned to Dudley to stand up.

"Jury, look upon the prisoner. Prisoner,

look upon the jury. Gentlemen of the jury, what is your verdict?"

"NOT GUILTY!"

With a glad sob Carmelita flung her arms around her husband's neck before he could sit down again. They were heedless for the moment of the attempts of the audience to cheer concertedly, of the efforts of Kendall to shake their hands, of the efforts of each man and woman on the jury to beat the other to them with congratulations. They stood locked in each other's arms, in a haze of emotions, a reaction that left them seemingly powerless to move. It was Gordon Kendall and his assistant who finally brought them back to earth.

In ten minutes Carmelita and Dudley were walking out of the courthouse between cheering lines of sympathizers that filled the sidewalk from the door to the curb, to Kendall's automobile.

CHAPTER XXV

A LIMOUSINE was speeding over the Long Island roads in the direction of Hedgewood in a manner that would have delighted the heart of Officer Joseph Delaney if he had been there to witness the sight. For then he could have twisted the gasoline control in the handles of his motorcycle until his speedometer registered sixty miles an hour and could have overhauled the flyer and in a grand manner presented him with a ticket entitling him to an interview at Hedgewood courthouse. Perhaps the two gentlemen in the car would have replied politely that they were bound for Hedgewood courthouse anyway to the trial of Dudley Drake. Whereupon Delaney could have told them that the trial was over and the defendant acquitted. And thus saved them some time and worry.

Both of the men were well dressed, distinguished looking personages well past middle age, but while the man on the right, who seemed to own the car, had iron-gray hair, his companion, evidently by continual applications of dye, had kept his hair and Van Dyke beard a glossy black.

Entering the village of Hedgewood, the limousine slowed down somewhat and came to a smooth stop in front of the courthouse. The gray-haired man embarked with surprising agility and entered the building. In ten minutes he came out again. His face wore a puzzled, incredulous expression, but it was wreathed in smiles. Something had evidently just been told him which he was finding difficult to comprehend.

"Ask somebody where Carmelita Drake's cottage is and then drive there," he instructed the chauffeur. The chauffeur questioned a lounger upon the low concrete wall enclosing the lawn in front of the courthouse, and five other loungers came forth eagerly to answer his question. The cottage of Carmelita Drake had become a show-place over night.

"By Jove, it's wonderful," the gray-haired man was telling his companion as the machine started again. "The trial is over and he has been acquitted. I don't understand it, but they tell me Carmelita confessed at the last minute that she was guilty of the shooting. Entirely justified, of course,—the Hindu branded her upon the back, a fearful sight they tell me. She showed the brand to the jury, and the whole courtroom went mad. A miracle."

"Carmelita—guilty?" the other man was repeating. He seemed unwilling to believe it.

But he had been hearing so many things about Carmelita lately. "You were right then, Drake, when you said there was more to the case than your nephew was telling. Perhaps if I had been in town the first time you called, I could, as you suggested, have talked with her and avoided all this painful trouble. But, on the other hand, perhaps the most dramatic way was the best. The appeal of a beautiful woman insulted and in distress, you know—it is very powerful in any country."

They drove into the grounds of Carmelita's house in an entirely different mood from the anxious one in which they had been breaking the law in the effort to reach the courthouse before the trial was over. They had failed in their effort—and miraculously succeeded. The butler at the door explained that Mr. and Mrs. Drake were seeing no one.

"If you will tell Mr. Drake that his uncle, Sanford Drake, is calling, perhaps he will change his mind."

Mr. Drake did change his mind. Moreover, he came out personally to the piazza to greet his uncle and have his hand nearly shaken out of its socket.

"I suspected you all the time—you poor, chivalric, heroic fool," Sanford Drake was joyously chiding him. The other man was looking at Dudley with appraising curiosity,

but the elder Drake made no effort to introduce them. In his enthusiasm, Dudley judged, his uncle had forgotten his manners.

"Carmelita will be delighted to see you," invited Dudley and held the door open for them. Carmelita stood in the center of the living-room wondering what was keeping her husband talking out there, for she had not heard the butler's message to Dudley. She had been putting Rao-Singh's necklace into a suitable box for mailing.

At the sight of one of the two visitors she uttered a delighted, incredulous, quite Spanish squeal of welcome that set her husband's nerves to tingling anew. Rushing past Sanford Drake, she hurled her arms and her slim, vibrant body upon the man to whom Sanford Drake had neglected to introduce his nephew, as if to demolish him with the ferocity of her greeting. And the recipient of her bearlike caresses seemed just as ferocious and Spanish in response.

Then Dudley heard her cry, "Father!" and he understood. When at last she released him, Don Caesar de Cordoba was a little embarrassed. His cravat was awry for one thing. And he was not used to giving way to such unseemly demonstrations of affection. Carmelita had become quite American in her attitude toward him. Where was the revered

respect in which she had once held him? But, there, he didn't mean that. He was joking.

At last, when he had begun to despair of it, Dudley was introduced to his father-in-law, and he offered chairs to everybody, Carmelita and he resuming their place very close together upon the divan.

"You are here, father, and how you miraculously got here is unimportant, perhaps. But I am curious," hinted Carmelita. "I have always thought one day we should meet again, and love each other again. But your last letter gave me no hope."

Don Caesar was a little ashamed. "Our pride, Carmelita, will carry us far in the wrong direction. It was your husband's uncle who made me see the light."

"And I'm afraid I was thinking of Dudley rather than you, Carmelita," Sanford Drake confessed. "From the first day Kendall and I talked with him I suspected that he wasn't telling us everything; that he was protecting somebody, probably you. I saw that he was deliberately railroading himself to prison for a long term—and I couldn't see my nephew and my partner wrecked. He had forbidden us to ask you questions. I had heard your father was in New York through my connections in the Street. I knew you and he were estranged but I took a chance and called at

his hotel. He was out of town and remained out of town until the first day of Dudley's trial. I reached him at the Ritz at midnight, last night, when he arrived from the Chicago train, and I have stayed with him until now, pleading, persuading, and, I'm afraid doing some threatening and bulldozing. I wanted him to come to Carmelita and get the truth out of her. He was the only one who could do it, I felt—that is, the only one near her that Dudley hadn't forbidden to talk to her.

"At first he wouldn't listen to me—and you have no idea how very cold and haughty your father can be when he wants to, Carmelita. I talked with him at the Ritz; I took him to my club and talked until morning. And finally he yielded."

"Perhaps I was not so hard to persuade as I pretended to be," Don Caesar said quietly. Carmelita had captured him and placed him on the other side of her on the divan and was stroking his hand affectionately. "I was ashamed of myself the instant I wrote that last letter to you, Carmelita. I knew then that I should yield sometime. It was a terrible blow to me, you can understand, that curt cable from Paris announcing the destruction of all my plans for you. However, I have seen your husband, and Don Pablo has died, and

perhaps everything has worked out for the best."

Having satisfactorily settled the past and the present, they came by easy stages to discussing the future, and here developed that the two older men had a plan.

"Señor de Cordoba has agreed to transfer his American representation from Hodge and Story to our concern, Dudley," Sanford Drake announced in his usual pompous business manner. "We shall need a responsible person to go to Buenos Aires and make the final detailed arrangements on the spot. If you and Carmelita should find it possible to make the trip, it would give all the unpleasant notoriety connected with your late trouble time to blow over, and upon your return, say six months from now, you could both start out afresh."

"I shall, of course, insist that you both be my guests while you are in South America," Don Caesar added.

Thus miraculously was the future, which had already been disturbing Dudley and Carmelita, solved.

CHAPTER XXVI

A STEAMSHIP, ghostly white in the cool September moonlight, was making its way silently across the Caribbean.

A man and a woman were standing very close together, leaning on the rail of the passenger deck. She had brought him out to show him the Southern Cross tilting in the sky ahead of them. But now the woman, a gloriously beautiful girl of twenty-four or five, changed the subject.

"There must be some very special Fate looking after me," she said gravely. "I have thought so many times since that day in the courtroom. Why has Fate been so good to me? I have been selfish, thoughtless, anything almost that a good woman should not be, and yet I have attained every one of my heart's desires. I have you and my father back again, and, though it doesn't seem at all important now, I have the money I once thought I could never do without."

He looked down at her, smiling.

"There is one very marvelous thing about most women, Carmelita," he said. "As soon

as the sun starts to shine, you have a wonderful gift for forgetting the terrible shadows you have been through. That is the chief reason the human race goes on. Men are usually not such good sports."

"Some men are."

"Perhaps. At any rate there would have been no benevolent Fate looking after you if you hadn't been worth it; if you weren't the good, heroic woman you are."

She was actually blushing. "Don't flatter me, Dudley," she bantered. "You have no idea how it goes to the head of us Spanish ladies."

"We shall see. In the meantime, you have promised the last dance to your father, and after that there is some excellent sleeping to be done, and an excellent stateroom to do it in, with a gently rolling ship to furnish a lullaby."

"As my husband says, 'Right-o.'"

The chronic dyspeptic who, huddled in his steamer rugs in the shadows because his doctor had warned him that the only way to avoid seasickness was to stay in the air, regarded Carmelita and Dudley with a jaundiced eye as they walked past him buoyantly arm in arm.

"Some people," he muttered to himself,

"have all the luck. Those two have obviously never had a care in the world. They don't know what it is to suffer."

A billion miles away a star winked down.

THE END

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